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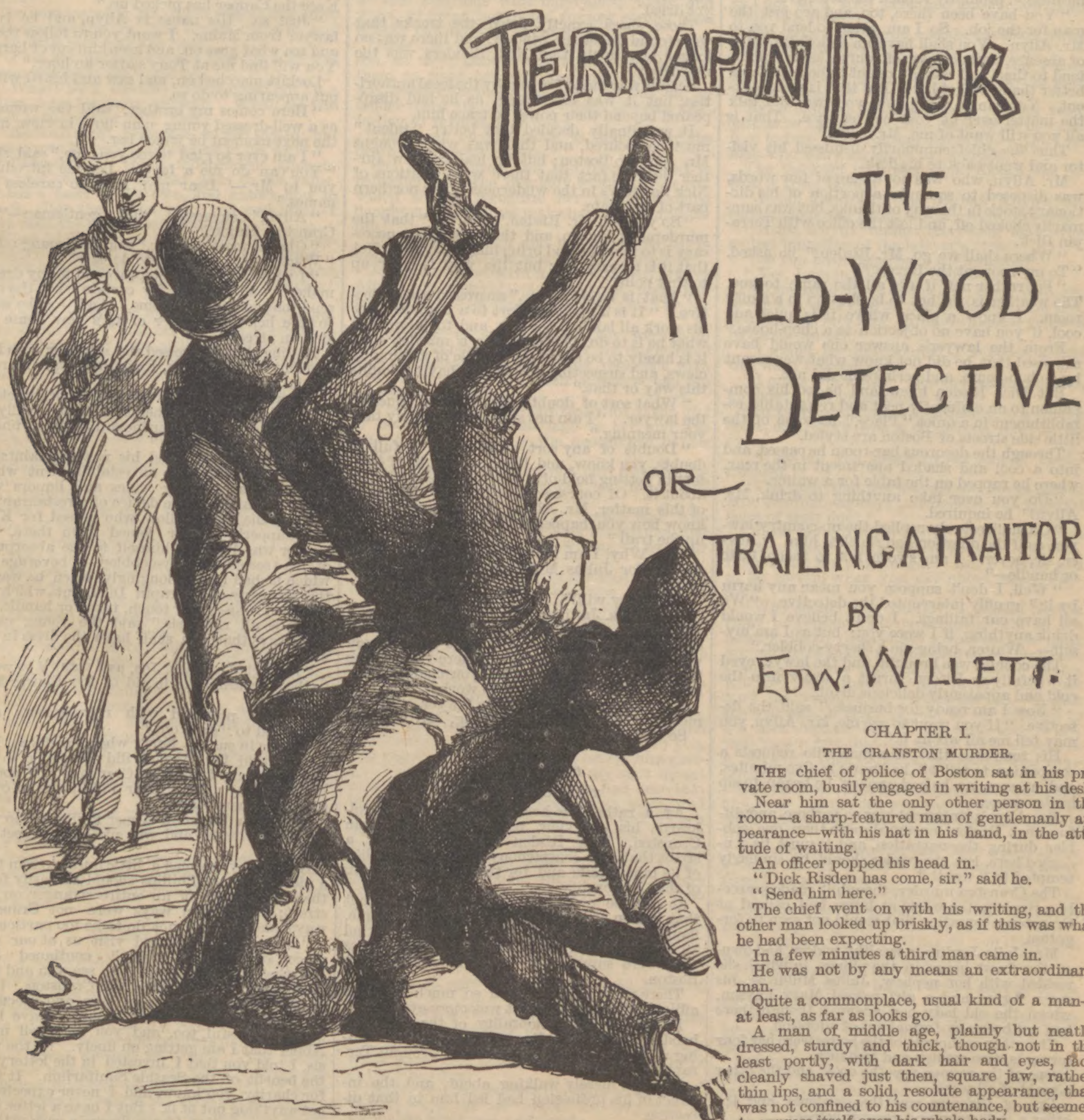
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HE QUICKLY INVERTED HIM, AND STOOD HIM ON HIS HEAD IN THE ROAD.

CHAPTER I.

THE CRANSTON MURDER.

THE chief of police of Boston sat in his private room, busily engaged in writing at his desk. Near him sat the only other person in the room—a sharp-featured man of gentlemanly appearance—with his hat in his hand, in the attitude of waiting.

An officer popped his head in.

"Dick Ridsen has come, sir," said he.

"Send him here."

The chief went on with his writing, and the other man looked up briskly, as if this was what he had been expecting.

In a few minutes a third man came in.

He was not by any means an extraordinary man.

Quite a commonplace, usual kind of a man—at least, as far as looks go.

A man of middle age, plainly but neatly dressed, sturdy and thick, though not in the least portly, with dark hair and eyes, face cleanly shaved just then, square jaw, rather thin lips, and a solid, resolute appearance, that was not confined to his countenance, but seemed to express itself over his whole body.

Quite a commonplace man, to look at, and he

did not pretend to be anything more than a commonplace man.

Yet Dick Ridsen was more than well known, and more than highly respected, among the detective force of that ilk.

In a certain part of the South, where he had done some rough and nifty work for the Government, he had become known as Terrapin Dick, because they have a saying down there to the effect that a terrapin, when it gets a grip, will "hold on till it thunders."

The pseudonym had followed him to his home in the North, and his fellows there had taken hold of it, and he was familiarly known among them as Terrapin Dick.

The chief not only looked up from his work when Dick Ridsen came in, but rose and came forward.

"This is the man you want," he said, addressing the gentleman who was waiting. "Ridsen, let me make you acquainted with Mr. Allyn, a lawyer, from Cranston, up in Maine. This matter of Mr. Allyn's, Dick, is not of our jurisdiction; but I am going to lend you to him, if you are willing to go as a loan. I suppose you have heard of the murder in Cranston. Big thing, for a small place."

"I have seen something about it in the papers," answered Ridsen.

"And that is all you know about it, I suppose. All the better, as you will take hold of it without prejudice. I like to have a man come to that sort of thing with as little previous information as possible, especially if there are doubts involved. But there seem to be no doubts in this business, and the only thing is to get the man and bring him in. Would you care to make a journey up into the north of Maine?"

"No objection to anything in the way of business," promptly replied the detective.

"You have been there, too, and are just the man for the job. So I am going to lend you to Mr. Allyn. You shall have an indefinite leave of absence, without pay, of course, as he will attend to that, and the pay ought to be something better than you get here. But that is your lookout. You can go along now, you two, and talk the matter over at your convenience. That is all you will want of me, Mr. Allyn."

Thus the chief summarily dismissed his visitor and went back to his desk.

Mr. Allyn, who was not a man of few words, was disposed to squander a portion of his dictionary stock in the way of thanks, but was summarily choked off, and left the office with Terrapin Dick.

"Where shall we go, Mr. Ridsen?" he asked.

"To my room at the Revere?"

"I'd rather not, if it's all the same to you. The weather is too hot to be shut up in a stuffy room. I know a place where it is quiet and cool, if you have no objection to a chop-house."

From the lawyer's answer one would have supposed that he did not know what was meant by a chop-house, and perhaps he did not.

But Dick Ridsen knew, and he led his companion to an eminently neat and respectable establishment in a quiet "Place," as some of the little side streets of Boston are styled.

Through the decorous bar-room he passed, and into a cool and shaded apartment in the rear, where he rapped on the table for a waiter.

"Do you ever take anything to drink, Mr. Allyn?" he inquired.

"Oh, no!" eagerly replied the up-country lawyer, as if the question had shocked him. "Never, sir, never. I am sworn not to touch, taste or handle—"

"Well, I don't suppose you mean any harm by it," gruffly interrupted the detective. "We all have our failings. I don't believe I would drink anything, if I were you; but as I am myself—waiter, bring me a sherry-cobbler."

The cobbler was brought, and the lawyer eyed it wistfully as Ridsen thrust a straw into the cold and apparently delicious drink.

"Now I am ready for business," said the detective. "If you want to use me, Mr. Allyn, you may tell me all about it."

His tone was that of a man who requests a companion to tell all he knows in five minutes, and, as soon as he had spoken, he began to sip his beverage.

Mr. Allyn's statement was so verbose and diffuse that Ridsen consumed more than one cobbler during the narration, and it must be condensed here, lest the reader should be similarly tempted to "wet it."

The Cranston murder, though it made scarcely a ripple in the world at large, had caused at Cranston a sensation that would not soon be forgotten.

Mrs. Julia Jardine, a wealthy widow, had owned the finest house in the village, in which she resided with her nephew, Julius Muldrow, his sister Agnes, and a girl named Mary Payson, whom the old lady had adopted, though there had not been any formal act of adoption.

The other occupants of the house were her four servants, two women and two men.

One of the women was the cook, and the other a maid of all work.

One of the men was the gardener, and the other a stableman and general helper.

Mrs. Jardine, though not an aged woman, was getting on in years, and was a chronic invalid,

confined to her room most of the time, averse to company, and seldom seeing anybody except on business.

In business matters, however, she was sharp enough in spite of her infirmities, having a will and a way of her own, and making everybody understand that she was the mistress.

She had taken Mary Payson into her house before her nephew and niece came to live with her, and it was supposed by some that she meant to adopt the orphan girl as her own child.

It was understood that Mary was very fond of her, and that she made much of the girl—at least, until the arrival of the others.

If there had been an intention of adopting Mary, it was never carried into effect, as Mrs. Jardine's life was suddenly and unexpectedly cut short.

She, indeed, was the victim of the Cranston murder.

One morning she was found dead in her bed by the maid of all work.

It was at first supposed that she had died of heart disease or some such complaint; but an examination showed the livid marks of fingers on her throat, and proved that she had been strangled to death.

Further investigation showed a window partly open, and tracks on the ground under the window.

It was soon discovered that Nick Sanders, the stableman and general helper, had absconded, and suspicion settled upon him at once.

The previous day he had been sent for by the old lady, who was displeased with him, and she then notified him that he must quit her service at the end of the month.

In Nick's vacant room were found a pair of old shoes of his, with mud on them that was not yet dried.

Those shoes exactly fitted the tracks that were found under the window, and there was no longer any doubt that Nick Sanders was the murderer.

Search was made for him by the local authorities; but it was unavailing, as he had disappeared beyond their power to trace him.

It was finally decided that better "talent" must be secured, and that was what brought Mr. Allyn to Boston; but he had no clew further than the fact that there were relations of Nick Sanders's in the wilderness of the northern part of the State.

"So you see, Mr. Ridsen," said he, "that the murderer is known, and the only thing necessary is to find him and bring him to justice. Not that it is an easy job; but the way is clear up to that point."

"That is mighty nice," answered the detective. "It is a great comfort to a man to have his work all laid out for him, and to know just what he is to do. Especially in a murder case, it is handy to be saved the trouble of looking up clews, and suspecting people, and having doubts this way or that."

"What sort of doubts, Mr. Ridsen?" queried the lawyer. "I am not sure that I exactly take your meaning."

"Doubts of any sort. The world is full of doubts, you know, and there is a sight of comfort in getting hold of a case that has no doubts about it. Of course somebody had to take hold of this matter, Mr. Allyn; but I would like to know how you happened to be the one to pick up the trail."

"I? Why, I am the attorney for the estate—that is, for Julius Muldrow and his sister, the heirs."

"Heirs by will?"

"No—Mrs. Jardine left no will."

"Just so. Very well, Mr. Allyn. You may consider me engaged, if you want me, and you will find me in the morning where you met me this morning. Then, unless you change your mind, I will be ready to go to work."

"I am satisfied," replied the lawyer. "I will meet you at nine in the morning, Mr. Ridsen." So they parted for the present.

CHAPTER II.

THE OLD ADAM.

At a rather late hour of the night that followed his interview with the lawyer from Cranston, Dick Ridsen was walking in a street that was conspicuous for the immorality of its inhabitants and for the public exhibition of that immorality.

It may be proper to note the grievous fact that Boston at that time, as at the present time, flaunted her immorality in the face of mankind more openly than did some of her sister cities that were supposed to be more wicked than Boston.

There may not have been so much of it as afflicted the others; but it was more evident.

It was not the immorality of the neighborhood—though in his line of business, and leading up to so much of it—that had brought Terrapin Dick there.

He was merely walking about, and the instinct of his profession had led him in that direction.

As he was slowly strolling along, he became aware of a face and form he knew.

Naturally he saw many people whom he knew; but this one specially attracted his attention.

The face and form were those of an acquaintance he had recently made—no other than Nathan Allyn, attorney at law, of Cranston, Maine.

Terrapin Dick naturally wondered what had brought him into that locality.

No—there is a distinction to be made. He did not wonder, but was curious to discover what he was there for.

With this object he followed him leisurely—quite leisurely, as Allyn was walking slowly and looking about, apparently taking in the sights.

Developments were soon in order.

The lawyer was accosted by a woman who was good-looking and neatly dressed, but whose face was professionally known to Dick Ridsen.

After a few words she took his arm, and they walked on together.

Dick Ridsen deemed it proper, if not important, that he should know the outcome of this episode; but he could not watch the parties as he wished to without disclosing himself to Allyn.

He did not, after the manner of the wonderful detectives depicted in some marvelous tales, step behind a lamp-post, and emerge, after the lapse of five minutes, so changed that his nearest friends would not have known him.

As that sort of thing was clearly impossible, he simply put another man in his place.

He beckoned to a member of the force in citizen's dress, who came across the street and joined him.

"Do you see that man yonder, Lockett—the tall and slim one with a high hat?"

"Yes—some duffer from the country that Kate the Capper has picked up."

"Just so. His name is Allyn, and he is a lawyer from Maine. I want you to follow them and see what goes on, and keep him out of harm. You will find me at Tony's after an hour."

Lockett marched on, and saw and heard without appearing to do so.

"Here comes my brother," said the woman, as a well-dressed young man hove in view, and the next moment he joined her.

"I am over so glad to see you, Joe," said she. "You can do me a favor. Let me introduce you to Mr.—Dear me! I am so careless of names."

"Allyn," suggested that gentleman—"of Cranston, Maine."

"Glad to meet you, sir," said the young man.

"What do you want me to do, sis?"

"I wish you would step around to my dress-maker's, and find out for certain when she can send that garnet silk home. And, Joe, be sure to give her the number of ma's new house on Beacon street."

Having thus impressed the stranger with her eminent respectability, Kate the Capper marched him on.

Her alleged brother went in another direction ostensibly to perform her errand, but really to investigate a Maine business directory, under the head of "Cranston."

Mr. Nathan Allyn and his new acquaintance found their way into an establishment where the business of selling wines and liquors was thinly disguised by the device of a restaurant.

When the young fellow who passed for Kate the Capper's brother joined them there, the lawyer was devoting himself to the absorption of his second sherry-cobbler—a beverage at which he had looked longingly, when he was in the company of Terrapin Dick, but which he had then refused to "touch, taste, or handle."

"It is all right, sis," said the young man. "She says that you shall have the dress in the morning."

"I am glad of that, Joe, as I want it to wear to the entertainment in aid of the Flower Mission."

Joe was provided with refreshments, and proceeded to "open out."

"I was in such a hurry when I met you, Mr. Allyn," said he, "that I did not think to ask you about my friends in Cranston. Of course you know my uncle, Abner Phillips, who owns the big tannery there."

Mr. Allyn did know Abner Phillips, who was one of his clients, and was pleased to meet his nephew.

It may have seemed a little queer to him that a niece of Abner Phillips should so easily form the acquaintance of an entire stranger on the street; but Boston ways were not Cranston ways, and it would not do to be too particular.

"You must come and visit us at our new place on Beacon street," continued Joe. "Mother will be very glad to see you and talk with you about her friends in Cranston. I am in the brokerage business here, and speculate considerably on my own account. Have been quite successful, too, and you may tell uncle Abner that I am getting on finely. By the way sis, I told you that I invested in the lottery for the benefit of the Seaside Sanitarium. It was, for charity, you know, and I never expected to get anything out of it. But I have a letter here informing me that I have drawn a cash prize of five hundred dollars. I suppose I must take it."

"Of course you must, Joe, if only to put the money in some other charity."

"The office is only a little way from here. Suppose you step out with me, sis, and see me draw the prize."

"Very well. Do you care to go with us, Mr. Allyn?"

No doubt Nathan Allyn had frequently read of the tricks of bunco swindlers, and deemed himself too wise and wary to be swindled by them; but the forbidden fruit that he had tasted had put him in a good humor, and he had been led on so easily and naturally that he had no suspicion of the conspirators.

He readily accepted the invitation, and then Dick Ridsen's friend Lockitt stepped forward.

"You will have to drop this, Joe," said the detective. "Sorry to have to break up your interesting little game; but I have orders not to allow this gentleman to be swindled. You and Kate had better toddle, before I get riled and run you in."

The two bunco sharps slid out of the place without a word; but Mr. Allyn was inclined to be angry, until Lockitt told him who he was, and explained the nature of the game which the confederates had been playing.

Then the lawyer thanked him, and went direct to his hotel.

Lockitt found Terrapin Dick at the rendezvous which the latter had named, and told him what he had seen and heard and done.

"Just as I expected," remarked Ridsen. "So he was actually drinking sherry cobbles. He looked as if he wanted some when he was with me, but was too good to touch a drop then. How full this world is of frauds, to be sure! But folks of his style don't often fool me much."

The next morning Mr. Allyn was at the police head-quarters before Dick Ridsen came in, and had a little talk with the chief.

"I am not quite sure that I like the man you recommended to me," said he.

"What! Dick Ridsen? There could not be a better man for your purpose. What do you think is the matter with him?"

"He is all right, I suppose, as you say so; but he seems to be very independent in his ways."

"Independent? He is independent enough, you may be sure; but that adds to his value. He has a head of his own, and knows how to use it. But that is between you and him. I have done the best I could for you."

When Dick came in, the lawyer made no objection to him, but began to talk about terms.

"We have offered a reward of one thousand dollars," said he. "That is pretty liberal, I guess."

"I never work for blood-money," gruffly answered Ridsen. "It is my business to attend to such matters, and I am paid for my time, if at all. A fixed rate and expenses. I shall need a guide, too, and a good one."

"No doubt we can find a suitable man, Mr. Ridsen."

"Oh, I know the right man—just the man I want, if I can get hold of him."

"Who is he?"

"Hank Ward, otherwise known as Hemlock Hank."

"I don't know him."

"But I do, you see. Now, Mr. Allyn, if my terms suit you, I will go right up to Cranston, and start from there."

"Very well. I will go with you."

"You needn't trouble yourself."

"But I prefer to. And one word more, Mr. Ridsen. I want you to understand that you will be under my orders in this business. Independence is a good thing in its way; but in every enterprise there must be one person in control, and I am that person in this affair."

"Just so. By the way, Mr. Allyn, how is the old Adam this morning?"

"The old—What do you mean, sir?"

"The old Adam. You know what that means. The preachers are always giving it to us. Do you care for any more of the company of that nice young woman and her brother? Do sherry-cobbles seem to be all that your fancy painted them?"

The lawyer's face turned red, and he muttered something unintelligible about curiosity and a clear conscience.

"Guess I took him down a peg that time, and he deserved it," was the private opinion of Terrapin Dick, when they had shaken loose from each other.

CHAPTER III.

"I WILL STAND YOU ON YOUR HEAD."

THE residence of the late Mrs. Jardine, as has been said, was the best house in Cranston.

It was not a very fine or costly place, but was quite a mansion for such a village.

Though the house and grounds did not represent a great amount of wealth, it was known that the widow had large sums securely and profitably invested, which brought her in more income than she was in the habit of spending.

Because of her possessions she had been looked up to by the villagers, most of whom were prone to love money for its own sake and to worship

those who had it, and on that account her unpleasant peculiarities were overlooked or even rated as virtues.

Mary Payson, whom she had taken into her house to be the comfort of her declining years, was an orphan without kith or kin that she knew of, and was a very pretty, sweet and lovable girl at the time of the old lady's sudden death.

There was no doubt in the village that Mrs. Jardine was very fond of the girl, and that Mary deserved the affection that was bestowed upon her, if not the great expectations that she had been led to anticipate.

Those expectations, if she had entertained them, as she must have been supposed to, were well founded, as the old lady had treated her as her own child, introduced her as Miss Jardine, and was understood to have the intention of formally adopting her and leaving her the bulk of the estate.

But Julius and Agnes Muldrow arrived, and their arrival made a change for Mary, though it was not believed that there was any change in the old lady's feeling.

Julius and Agnes were the children of her husband's sister, whom she had never liked, and she did not pretend to be fond of them.

But they were her relatives, and were in need, and she gave them a home and was reasonably kind to them, though it was the opinion of the village that there was not much love lost on either side.

Julius Muldrow was a young man of twenty-six, and it was said that he was inclined to be dissipated, though he surely curbed any such inclination very well while he was under his aunt's roof.

Agnes was an angular and sharp-featured young woman of twenty-four—not an old maid at that age, but with old-maidish looks and ways, who was not noted for any special good quality but devotion to her brother.

These two were at least polite to Mary Payson, as their aunt would not have permitted them to treat her with any open discourtesy; but, as they doubtless felt that she was an intruder there, they could not help showing that feeling in various little ways.

The great change came to Mary after the death of her benefactress.

She had believed, and had been justified in believing, that the old lady would leave a will which should recognize her as an adopted daughter, and at least make her comfortable for life.

But careful search and inquiry failed to reveal any will, and she was left out in the cold.

Julius Muldrow, with the assistance of lawyer Allyn, administered on the estate, and took possession of it for himself and his sister as the next of kin.

Somewhat to her surprise, they were both very kind to her after that, and she might have been reconciled to a continued residence with them, if the motive of their kindness had not become too apparent.

Whether Julius Muldrow really loved the girl or not, he proposed marriage to her, and was urgent in pressing for the acceptance of his offer.

Mary Payson, however, not only disliked Julius Muldrow exceedingly, but had a lover of her own.

This was Ben Lawson, a young man who had gone to Colorado to seek his fortune, and she was true to him, and willing to wait for him.

So she at once and firmly declined the Muldrow offer with thanks, but was careful to make no mention of the lover in Colorado.

Strong as the refusal was, it was not strong enough to cause Julius to abandon his intention, and he continued to persecute her in the name of what he called his love.

His sister was yet more persistent and aggravating in her annoyances.

"I don't see what you can expect to do, Mary," said Agnes Muldrow. "It is very kind and liberal in my brother to offer to marry you, and you are a fool if you don't accept him gladly. I suppose you fancy that my aunt meant to do something for you; but she had been taking care of you for more than three years, and no doubt she thought she had done well enough by you. Julius has offered to do better by you than his aunt would ever have done, and I see nothing for you if you refuse his offer. It surprises me that he should want you, when there are plenty of pretty girls with money who would be glad to get him."

These persecutions made the girl's position almost unbearable; but she could not easily settle upon the best way to free herself from them.

There was only one way she could think of just then.

She might write to Ben Lawson, explaining her difficulties, and ask his advice.

This was what she decided to do, and she wrote him a long letter, and started to carry it to the post-office.

Hardly had she reached the main street of the village, when she ran across the very man to whom her letter was addressed.

The sight of that tall, bronzed and bearded young fellow, which had already made the

Cranston villagers stare, was a vast relief to her.

There was nothing in Ben Lawson's appearance to indicate a wild man of the West.

His attire was a neat business suit, and he did not wear his hair long, and his head was crowned with a light straw hat instead of an ominous felt or sombrero.

But his swinging stride, his free and open look, and the general self-assertion of his style, spoke to the villagers of conscious strength, readiness of action, and fertility of resources.

It was natural that he should impress Mary Payson as a man of force, who could hold his own among men, and upon whose physical and moral qualities she might securely depend.

"Oh, Ben!" she exclaimed, almost hysterically. "I am so surprised and so glad. I have written you a long letter, and was just going to put it in the post-office."

"Yes, I know. You may give it to me now, and I will read it after a while."

"But how did you happen to come on, Ben, just when I wanted you so much?"

"As soon as I heard of the old lady's death I thought you would need me, and here I am."

"All the way from Colorado, too. I am afraid that—"

"Don't be afraid of anything, Mary. Brace up, and look the world in the eye, and hit straight from the shoulder. That's what I am here for, and I guess I will find something to hit before long."

"What do you mean, Ben?"

"We must have a talk, dear—not at the dead woman's house, or where any prying eyes or listening ears can take us in. Come and walk with me, out of the reach of all these houses. We must make a short and sharp talk of it, too, as I am on a trail here, and must follow it up while it is fresh."

The girl took his arm, and they walked away together, talking as they went.

When Ben Lawson returned to the village Mary Payson was not with him, having gone home by another route.

As he entered the village by a country road, just as he turned into the main street he came face to face with Nathan Allyn and a thick-set man who was a stranger in Cranston.

The thick-set man was Dick Ridsen, the detective from Boston.

"Hello, Lawson!" was Nathan Allyn's unceremonious and by no means cordial greeting.

"Hello, Allyn!" replied the young man, with a close imitation of the lawyer's tone.

"So you have come back to Cranston?"

"Yes, I am here—every inch of me."

"Come back like a bad penny, hey? Well, sir, if you are expecting to marry that Payson girl, and to come into Mrs. Jardine's money, you will be disappointed."

"I would be disappointed, I suppose, if that was what I expected."

"I guess you would. The girl is disappointed, anyhow. Her game didn't work."

Ben Lawson's bronzed face flushed to a copper color, and there was a dangerous light in his eyes.

"What do you mean by her game?" he demanded.

"The game that she was playing to get hold of Mrs. Jardine's money, and deprive the rightful heirs of their dues."

"Look here, Nathan Allyn. You may abuse me or slander me as much as you want to. I don't care for your tongue. But I advise you to be careful what you say about Mary Payson."

"Why should I be careful? I guess I have a right to repeat what is common talk in the neighborhood. Everybody knows that she hung around the old lady, and toadied to her, until she thought that she had reason to believe that a will had been made in her favor. And that ain't the worst of it. When she believed that the will was all right, it was to her interest to get Mrs. Jardine out of the way, and it is a well-known fact that she was as thick as peas in a pod with Nick Sanders, the scamp who committed the murder."

Ben Lawson's face had turned ashy pale, and any man but the one who was speaking to him would have seen that it was not safe to trifle with him.

Terrapin Dick saw it, and there was a queer twinkle in his larboard eye as he edged away from his companion.

"Take that back, Nathan Allyn," said the young man as he stepped forward. "Take it back, I say, or you will be sorry for it."

"Sorry for it, hey? What do you think you would do, you young scapegrace?"

"I will stand you on your head."

"I take nothing back. Don't dare to touch me, you ruffian!"

Ben Lawson did dare, and he put his threat into execution with most commendable certainty and celerity.

Grasping the lawyer's coat collar with his left hand, and seizing him at the hip with his right hand, he quickly inverted him, and stood him on his head in the road, Terrapin Dick evidently enjoying the performance.

Nathan Allyn screamed and kicked; but his struggles were unavailing as long as the young

athlete chose to hold him in that ignominious attitude.

Terrapin Dick stepped forward.

He winked significantly at Ben Lawson, and pointed down the road.

The young man bowed politely, dropped his victim, and walked away in the direction indicated.

The lawyer scrambled to his feet, covered with dust and loaded with wrath.

"Why did you let that scoundrel treat me so?" he angrily demanded. "Why didn't you arrest him?"

"It is understood," quietly answered the detective, "that I am under your orders, and you had given me no instructions on that point. If I had a will of my own, now—"

"Oh, bother!"

The lawyer declared his intention of prosecuting his assailant and punishing him to the utmost extent of the law.

He hastened to set the legal machinery in operation for that purpose.

But, when a warrant had been procured, and search was made for Ben Lawson, he was not to be found.

He had disappeared, and many weeks passed before he was again seen in Cranston.

CHAPTER IV.

A BEAR ON GUARD.

WEST of the main branch of the Penobscot a mountain peak rose abruptly out of a seemingly endless expanse of forest.

From its summit a vast stretch of country was visible, which appeared to be all forest, save where other mountain peaks towered to the sky, or where the monotony was broken by the placid surface of lakes, of which there were plenty in view, or the silver threads of winding streams.

But it is not with the summit of the peak that we have to do, nor yet with the mountain itself, but with a man who is toiling toward it, and is still at a considerable distance from it.

He was a rough-looking man, with the appearance of having spent a long time traveling and camping out in the woods, and the wear and tear of that sort of life were plainly visible in his garments, which had been at their best of poor and cheap material.

In person he was a little over the average height, but slim and "gangling," big-boned and awkward.

He had, withal, a vacant or uncertain expression of countenance, as if he were not altogether as strong-minded as the most of men.

His weapons were an old-fashioned hunting rifle of small caliber, and a sheath-knife.

It was near the end of summer, and the weather was very warm, especially there in the depth of the forest, where scarcely a breath of air was stirring.

The effects of the heat were to be noted in the spicy fragrance that loaded the forest, the resinous trees having been compelled to give up their odors until the air was heavy with them.

They were also quite too manifest in the clouds of mosquitoes that surrounded and accompanied the traveler, who was continually beating them off with a spruce bough, accompanying the action with language that would not have passed muster in a prayer meeting.

"Dang the 'skeeters!" he exclaimed, as he stumbled about among the ravines and ridges that obstructed the approach to the mountain.

"Dang the 'skeeters! Darned if I don't believe that a feller would be better off in some safe State prison where they couldn't git at him. Plenty o' grub, a place to sleep, and no 'skeeters. That sounds sorter like heaven to me jest now. If I'd ha' knowed what I had to go through on this tramp, I'd ha' gi'n myself up. But it's a big p'int to be free, spite of everythin', and now that I've got this fur along, there's no use grumblin' at the rest o' the trip."

He tramped wearily on, fighting off the mosquitoes with his spruce bough, and veering here and there over the rough and broken ground about the foot of the mountain, as if looking for something that was not at all easy to find.

"Dang it all!" he said, at last, as he stopped and stared about in perplexity.

"Dang it all! Here's night a-comin' on, and I can't seem to strike that trail. Darned if I ain't likely to have to camp out another night, and all my grub gone. Hope they hain't moved away, anyhow."

He went forward a few steps further, and came to a narrow but well-trodden path.

He uttered a cry of joy as he struck it, and followed it rapidly to the mountain and up its rugged side.

It was a toilsome tramp, especially as he was already wearied by much walking; but he pressed forward hopefully, cheered by the belief that there would soon be an end to his tribulations.

At last, and at a point well up the steep mountain-side, he reached the terminus of his long and toilsome journey.

Through a rugged wall of rock that rose abruptly before him opened a narrow pass, into which led the trail that he was following.

Again he dashed forward with a joyful cry, but retreated yet more rapidly and in a state of dire consternation.

The cause of his sudden retrograde movement was a savage growl, followed by the rush of a large and dark beast.

The beast was a bear that had been concealed in the pass, and in its rush it had nearly reached the intruder and knocked him over.

Instinctively he raised his rifle to defend himself, but lowered it when he perceived the real state of the case.

The bear was reared on his hind feet just outside the mouth of the pass, and was struggling to get further, but was restrained from so doing by a chain that was fastened around his neck and led back into the pass.

"Must be a tame bear," muttered the traveler, "and they've got him tied there as a sort o' guard. Guess I won't tackle him. But they must be inside, and I'll fetch 'em out."

He opened his rather large mouth, and yelled at the top of his voice:

"Hello-o-o! Ike Sanders! Hello, Dave! Hello-o-o!"

Again and again he shouted, waking the echoes of the mountain and forest far and near, but producing no visible effect beyond exciting the antagonism of the bear, which made frantic efforts to get at him.

Exhausted by his unavailing vociferations, he seated himself on a rock at the side of the trail, well out of Bruin's reach.

"Dang it all!" he exclaimed, "this is too bad. They must be all off somewhere, as they couldn't help hearin' me if they was in there. There ain't nothin' for me to do but stay here and wait fur 'em, and it's gettin' dark, and I'm all-fired hungry."

He took from the dirty canvas bag at his side some stale scraps of food, and began to gnaw them.

Then it occurred to him that he might as well try to curry favor with the bear, and he advanced toward that unaccommodating beast, cautiously holding out a chunk of cold bacon, and addressing him in soothing and enticing tones.

"So, bear! Good bear! Nice bear! Have a bite, old feller? Take a bite of good bacon?"

But the bear was not to be soothed, and showed a strong disposition to take a bite of nothing but the man.

The bacon was tossed to him; but he sniffed at it contemptuously, and actually turned up his nose.

Clearly he was accustomed to a better quality of food than that.

As it was useless to attempt to conciliate the bear, the man varied the monotony of waiting by another series of yells.

Soon he was gratified by hearing an answering halloo from down the mountain.

Again he yelled, and again he heard the answering shout.

Satisfied that his friends were approaching, he sat down and tranquilly awaited their arrival.

It was dusk when they came in sight, toiling up the mountain-side on foot, four of them in all.

One was a middle-aged man, bronzed and grizzled. Another was a woman who showed the effects of rough weather and hard work. The third was a young man of twenty-one or upward, active, athletic, and evidently as tough as a pine knot. The fourth was a lad of perhaps seventeen, dwarfed, misshapen, and with an old face and remarkably bright eyes.

All were roughly dressed in the coarsest and stoutest of woolen and cotton garments, and all had the appearance of being pretty well "tuckered out."

The two men carried heavy strings of fish, and the woman and the lad each bore a heavy basket of blueberries.

CHAPTER V.

NICK SANDERS'S STORY.

THE traveler arose as the four mountaineers came into view, and advanced to meet them with a vapid and uncertain smile on his face, as if doubting what sort of a reception he might get.

He spoke volubly and in the most conciliatory tones he could command.

"Howdy do, uncle Ike? Glad to see you lookin' so well, aunt Sereeny. It's easy to see that there ain't no discount on you, cousin Dave. And how is cousin Abner gittin' on—bless his heart?"

Astonishment, rather than joy, seemed to be the prevailing emotion among those he addressed, and all looked to the oldest of the party to say what was fitting upon the occasion.

That individual shoved back the hair from his brow, and stared at the traveler a full minute before he spoke.

"It is!" he exclaimed. "Darned if it ain't! It's Nick Sanders! Who'd ha' thought it? What ever brought you up here ag'in, young man?"

"Jest take a look at my shoes, uncle Ike," jocularly replied Nick Sanders, "and you won't doubt that my feet did that job."

"Bah! You know what I mean. Why did

you come here? Squeeze out a little truth, if you can, for once in a way. We are tired and hungry, and can't stay here to swap lies."

"I am tired and hungry, too. The fact is, uncle Ike, that I got tired o' stayin' down yander, and came all the way up here to see my own folks, all that's left to me in this world."

"Jest for that?" demanded Ike Sanders. "It won't do, Nick. There's su'thin' behind your talk. But we will find it out afore long, and we won't worry. Whatever's the matter, we ain't the sort to set down on our own kith and kin."

He gave Nick his hand, and the others hastened to follow his example, making the young man feel at home, and doubtless relieving his mind of a weight.

"Why didn't you go inside, Nick, and look us up?" quizzically inquired Dave Sanders, "uncle Ike's" eldest son.

"Wal, Dave, the fact is that there's a dark gentleman there, dressed in hair, who wasn't acquainted with me, and I didn't have the password, and he seemed to think that I'd better wait outside."

"That's Abner's bear," said uncle Ike. "He's a right good chap to leave on guard, is Boney."

"He don't look to be a bit bony, uncle Ike," remarked Nick, with another of his feeble attempts to be witty.

"Oh, that's the name Abner gi'n him. Bony-parte's his full name, and you never see sech a crittur. 'Twould astonish you to know what Abner can do with him. The boy seems to understand bear natur' most 'mazingly. Give Boney his supper now, Abner, and then we'll all go inside together."

The bear had seen the strings of fish, and was making demonstrations that clearly indicated his desire to feast upon them.

Among the fine trout on the strings were about an equal number of chub, and these, it appeared, were destined for the consumption of Master Bruin.

The misshapen lad shambled forward with a string of fish in his hand, plucked off a chub, and pitched it to Boney, who nipped it with the adroitness of a base-ball catcher, and quickly caused it to disappear.

Another and another went the same way, Boney fully proving his ability as a catcher and a devourer.

Then Abner Sanders walked up to him with a few chub in his hand, and made a gesture that sent Bruin up on his haunches with his fore-paws in the air, his red tongue hanging out, and his attitude expressive of a desire for more.

The lad laid a chub on his nose, and Bruin gave it a toss in the air, catching it as it came down, after the manner of a trained dog.

Three more chub were thus served up to him, and Abner declared that there was enough of that for the present.

"Boney ain't no circus bear," said he, "and it's late, and I'm hungry, and I'd rather feed him about the house."

He loosed the bear's chain from its fastening in the pass, gathered it up in his hands, jumped on the back of the beast, and away Bruin trotted in advance of the others, making not the faintest objection to the weight he carried.

Nick Sanders and his relatives followed Abner and the bear, and entered a peculiar cup-shaped basin, which seemed to be inaccessible except by way of the pass.

It was perhaps five or six acres in extent, and in the center was a lake, whose outlet through the pass was at that time of the year a scarcely visible brook.

Patches of cereals and garden-stuff filled the remainder of the basin, except on one of the shelving sides, where the primitive forest nearly concealed a substantial log-cabin.

Abner and the bear led the way to the house, which proved to be quite a comfortable and commodious abode, well protected and provided against the long and hard winters of the northern wilds.

Mrs. Sanders at once set at work to get supper, and Ike Sanders and his son Dave had various "chores" to do before night set in.

So there was nothing for Nick to do but watch the performances of Abner and Boney.

The lad finished giving Bruin his supper of chub, and in feeding him caused him to play many pranks that showed an almost human intelligence and a strong desire to please his two-legged comrade.

For dessert Abner treated him to blueberries, which the big brute ate contentedly out of the lad's hand, patiently waiting until he was helped, and showing no greediness.

"That's enough, Boney," said Abner at last. "Run away, now, and take a swim."

The bear, as if he understood the English language, turned and trotted off in the direction of the lake.

By this time Ike Sanders and Dave had finished their tasks, and supper was ready, and all gladly sat down to enjoy it.

It deserved the attention it received, as the fresh and juicy trout, crisply fried, would have been a feast for an epicure, and the appetites of the mountaineers were something marvelous.

Little was said during the meal, as all were so intently occupied in satisfying their hunger that they had no time to talk.

It was not until after supper, when pipes were produced, and they seated themselves in front of the house, that there was any conversation worth mentioning.

Abner gathered up the remnants of the meal, and brought them out to Boney, who had come back from his swim, and who cleaned out the platter in short order.

"Now, Nick," said Ike Sanders, "I guess we had better come down to the facts. I want the plain truth and nothin' but the truth, and the best thing you can do is to make a clean breast of the business. What was it, Nick, that drove you up here?"

Nick turned pale, gasped, and trembled until he could hardly hold his pipe.

Then he gulped down his emotion, straightened himself up, and told his story.

"The square truth is, uncle Ike, that it was stealin' that made me run away."

"I guessed it was suthin' of the sort," remarked Ike with a sigh.

"That's jest what it was. I was workin' fur a rich old lady down there, at a little town called Cranston. I saw a chance to take a hundred dollars and a gold watch of hers, and I gobbled 'em, thinkin' I wouldn't be found out; but I was ketch'd at it. The old lady was mighty good. She said that she wouldn't bother me, but I must leave her house. She told me to go away and try to be honest, and she hoped that the scrape would be a lesson to me.

"So it was, and I'd ha' gone along, and staid about there, and minded what the old lady told me, if it hadn't been for her nephew.

"His name was Julius Muldrow, and he came to me, and told me that the law people had got hold of that stealin' scrape, and that a warrant was out fur me, and that I'd be jerked up and sent to State Prison if I didn't run away.

"He gave me a little money, and that looked as if he meant well by me. So I cut out, and came up here, as you folks are the only friends I've got in the world. I've had a long and hard tramp, and all the while I've been wonderin' if that feller lied to me."

"Guess he didn't," remarked Ike Sanders. "The way of the transgressor is hard, and you must ha' found that out by this time. I'm glad it ain't no wuss, Nick. They got back what you stole, I suppose?"

"Yes, I gi'n it up."

"That's some consolation, anyhow, though you had to do it. It's a good thing that you came up here, Nick. If you can't keep your hands off o' other folks' prop'ty, the furrer you git inter the woods the better. There ain't much to steal about here."

"That's so," remarked aunt Sereeny. "We're poor enough up this way, and honest enough, too."

Abner had been edging toward his cousin, and was regarding him quite affectionately.

"I'm mighty glad that you came here, cousin Nick," said he.

"Why so, Abner?"

"Dad and Dave sometimes tell me that I've got less sense than most folks; but I know I can lay over you in the way of sense, and it makes me feel better to have you here."

Nick took this in good part, and spoke pleasantly to his young cousin.

"Guess you're right about that, Abner. Anybody who can train a bear as you've trained that critter o' yours has got more sense than I claim to have."

"Arter all," remarked Ike Sanders, "it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. Nick can shoot straight, and nobody ever accused him of bein' afraid of anythin', and that sort of a man may be useful to us about now."

"Why, uncle Ike, what's the matter?"

"There's a band o' Kanucks prowlin' about, and they're liable to pounce on us at any time."

"Is there anything here they would want to steal?"

"You don't know 'em, Nick. They'd rather steal a rotten pair o' leather breeches, than come honestly by a decent suit o' clothes. I'm glad you're here, Nick, and glad that the scrape you spoke of warn't no wuss."

CHAPTER VI.

THREE NOT OF A KIND.

ON the right bank of a narrow and quiet stream that wandered darkly through what seemed to be an unbroken and endless forest, was a small encampment.

It was only a canvas tent, in front of which were the embers of a fire, from which rose the heavy odors of smoldering boughs of the spruce and the fir, and yet nearer to the water's edge was a flat-bottomed skiff, overturned, and scattered about under the trees were various cooking utensils, cans of provisions, and other articles of necessity or comfort for a journey in the wild woods.

The element of human life was further supplied to the scene by three men who sat near the fire—near enough for the fumes of the smoldering brush to drive away the mosquitoes and the midges—and who were there smoking tranquilizing pipes preparatory to "turning in" for the night.

One of the men was rather short and thick-set but with a face full of intelligence and determination.

This was Dick Riden, the detective from Boston, otherwise known as Terrapin Dick.

Another was a younger man, tall, dark, and with a peevish and ill-humored expression of countenance.

This was Julius Muldrow, who had come with Dick Riden, to make sure that the work for which the detective had been hired should be done to the satisfaction of his employers.

The journey into the wilderness had not been by any means a pleasant experience to Julius Muldrow—this much was visible in everything he did and said—and he seemed to be possessed mainly by an impatient desire to finish the business and have done with it.

The third man was tall, heavily-built, bronzed, grizzled-bearded, and clad in the coarse blouse and trousers tucked into high boots that were the usual wear of loggers and lumber prospectors.

This was Hank Ward, widely known in the woods and elsewhere as Hemlock Hank, whom Dick Riden had selected as his guide and assistant for that expedition.

It would not have been necessary to see much of the party to become assured of the fact that Julius Muldrow had no special liking for Hemlock Hank.

There was, indeed, such an antipathy between them as could not tend to make them pleasant companions for a long jaunt.

But, for that matter, it might be said that a similar antipathy existed, though more carefully smothered or concealed, between Julius Muldrow and Dick Riden.

The detective and the guide each had his opinion of the man whom they had been compelled to accept as a companion; but each had his own way of expressing or showing it.

Hank Ward, independent and restive, was disposed to resent any dictation or criticism from the man who was to pay him for his services.

Dick Riden, equally independent, but less restive, was in the habit of treating his employer with a sarcastic deference which Muldrow easily saw through, and which must have fretted him at times not a little.

Two would have been good company in that party—much better company than three.

As they sat there and smoked, the animus of the three occasionally cropped out, as it was sure to do when they conversed about business or any other matter.

The stream which they had been following was very low at that time of the year, though in the spring it was a succession of furious torrents and broad lakes, and they had reached a point at which further progress by water was impossible, as even their skiff had often scraped the bottom, and could not be expected to pass the "riffle" beyond their camp.

The stoppage of their water journey was the subject that interested them as they sat there and smoked.

"I must say that you have got us into a sweet scrape up here," crossly remarked Julius Muldrow, with an aggravating kind of sneer.

"As how?" mildly inquired the detective.

"Why, here we are, stuck in the mud, as I may say, and not a foot further can we get, as you admit. What did you want to come up this cursed creek for, when there are plenty of rivers with water in them?"

"Your instructions were, Mr. Muldrow, as I understood them, that we should take the shortest route to reach the point we were aiming at, and this is what we have tried to do."

"This must be the shortest route, I suppose, as it has come to a full stop. I would like to know how you expect to get any further."

"For my part, Mr. Muldrow, I have been provided by nature with a pair of legs which can get over ground pretty well, short as they are. Yours are longer, and ought to do better work. Hemlock Hank's legs have always been considered good articles of their kind."

"You bet they have!" exclaimed the guide. "They are sound and solid, and I've never yet failed to git good work out of 'em."

"So we will have to go on the tramp. How much of this plunder must we pack through the woods?"

"Not much of it," answered Riden. "Only a good supply of ammunition, and a little something in the way of provisions. The rest we will cache here."

"Do what?"

"Hide them, so that they will be safe, and we can get them when we want them."

"Well, that might not be so bad, if you knew where you are going to. But you don't."

"That's a fact, Mr. Muldrow. It is the old story of a needle in a haystack, and the haystack is a mighty big one."

"I supposed that Ward there knew something about it. Is he as ignorant as the rest of us?"

"Almost. He knows that there are some people somewhere about here named Sanders. He met one of them once who was acting as a guide. They live up here the year through. That is all he knows."

"I don't see the use of paying a guide,"

sneered Muldrow, "if that is all he amounts to."

Hemlock Hank, who had been fidgeting, knitting his brow, and otherwise showing his displeasure at the course of the conversation, got up and walked away.

Terrapin Dick's eyes snapped, and his lip quivered under his heavy mustache, but he continued to speak quite calmly.

"A guide is of a great deal of use, Mr. Muldrow, and such a guide as Hank Ward is well worth his pay, every dollar of it. If we are to find the man we are seeking, it will be through the help of our guide. We would play a precious poor game without him. I would advise you, too, if you care for the success of this business—I might as well go further, and say if you care for your own safety—to treat Mr. Ward like a white man, and quit your flings at him. He is one of the most patient men I ever knew; but there are limits to patience."

"There are limits to my patience, I know," grumbled Julius, "and I am getting tired of knocking about here for nothing. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if you men should propose to stay here all winter."

"We might," briefly replied the detective.

"You might? It is enough to make a saint swear to hear such a thing hinted at."

"I have done it before now, Mr. Muldrow, when I was on business somewhat similar to this. I may do it again, if the search calls for it. But we are throwing away words, if not worse. There is nothing to be gained by this kind of a discussion. If you get tired, and want to go home, a way will be found for you to get out of the woods. Hank Ward and I will do the best we can, and the best we can all do just now is to turn in and get a good night's rest."

Terrapin Dick called to the guide, who was slowly approaching the camp after walking off his fidgets, and preparations for slumber were made.

"Are you going to leave that stuff lying around loose?" inquired Julius Muldrow, pointing at the articles that had been unloaded from the skiff.

"I guess so," answered Riden. "They ought to be safe enough here. Don't you think so, Hank?"

"I should say so. We will build up the fire to keep off any varmints that may be sneakin' around, and I don't know of anythin' that is likely to bother the stuff."

The three men crept into their tent, which was carefully pinned to the ground at the sides, with the flap fastened, and within they made a little smudge to worry any marauding mosquitoes that might steal through the canvas.

There they slept soundly—very soundly—through the entire night.

CHAPTER VII.

PLUNDERING PROWLERS.

If the three men in the tent had not slept so soundly, it would have been better for them.

In the silence and darkness of the night there were mysterious goings-on about their camp.

Dark figures moved stealthily hither and thither, making no more noise than the bats and owls that flitted through the forest, and when they disappeared, the amount of portable articles left lying around loose had diminished to nearly nothing.

When Dick Riden and his companions crawled out of their tent in the morning they were astonished, mortified and disgusted.

Their boat was missing, and nearly all their property had vanished.

They could not do justice to the subject.

Silently they stood and stared at each other, and at the spot where their goods had been.

Julius Muldrow sneered as he looked at the others, and he was the first to find his tongue.

"Just as I told you," said he. "You would not listen to my advice and take care of the stuff, and now everything is gone. That is what comes of carelessness and over-confidence. I would really have thought that a man who had been used to the woods all his life might have been trusted to take reasonable care of things."

Dick Riden made no answer to this insulting speech, though his eyes snapped.

But Hemlock Hank, who felt that the sneers and slurs were intended for him, let his wrath blaze out.

He turned quickly upon his sneering assailant, his bronzed face dark with anger, and a dangerous look in his eyes.

"Look here, young man," said the indignant guide, speaking slowly and calmly, but with plenty of force and emphasis; "there's got to be a stop put to this sort o' thing. I've stood as much of it as I'm goin' to stand. If you think that the bit of money you are to pay me is to make me put up with your naggin' and insultin' ways, you don't know Hank Ward. Not yet!"

"I have said nothing but the truth," grumbled Julius.

"If you hain't dared to speak lies plainly, you've hinted and insinuated lies a-plenty, and that's the meanest and sneakin'est thing a white

man kin do. Your naggin' and proddin' has got to stop, and that's the long and the short of it."

"I guess I will say what I please," sulkily remarked Julius.

"Then you may guess that I will do what I please, young man; and if you don't mind the advice I give you, you are liable to get hurt."

Dick Ridsen interposed, and patched up a truce that was not a peace.

He was quite willing that his friend Ward should give the unpleasant person from Cranston a bit of his mind, but did not wish that sort of a joke to be carried too far.

"We are wasting time as well as breath," said he. "Instead of quarreling here, we had better agree to get along as peaceably as we can and join in to try to find out who or what has done this damage, and to get on the trail of our property."

"You are right there," admitted the guide; "and if you two will stand aside a bit and give me a good chance to squint around, mebbe we will soon know somethin' about it."

Hemlock Hank was given ample opportunity to "squint," and he made a careful examination of the ground, especially at the water's edge.

He speedily satisfied himself.

"This is an easy drive," he said. "We have been robbed by a party of Kanucks."

"How do you know that?" inquired Terrapin Dick.

"The tracks are plain, and there's plenty of them, and the Kanucks, when they don't use moccasins, wear a shoe that is different from any of ours. Oh, I am as sure that a party of Kanucks took the things, as I am that the things are gone. There's more or less of the thiev' vagabonds loafin' about here every fall, though it's seldom that they git their work in so early."

"When you speak of Kanucks," remarked Julius, "I suppose you mean French Canadians. Are they all thieves?"

"Not a bit of it. Jest as honest men among 'em as ever lived; but it's only the thieves who prowl about here, and there ain't one of 'em who won't bear watchin'."

"Can you tell us how many there were in the party?" asked the detective.

"No. The tracks are so many, and so mixed up, that I couldn't even give a guess. The parties run generally from two to six, and there must ha' been more'n two in this gang."

"Of course they have gone down the river."

"No doubt o' that, Dick. They couldn't ha' gone anywhere else, as they went in our skiff, and there was only one chance for her."

"Then all we have to do is to go down the river after them, without losing any more time."

"Jest so. But there's the tent, and we've got a few things left here."

"Oh, one must stay and watch the camp, of course, and I have no doubt that Mr. Muldrow will be willing to be the man, if not glad."

Julius protested that they need not be so sure of that, as he was as fond of adventure and excitement as anybody, and disliked being left alone.

"But there is the long and hard tramp," argued Ridsen, who easily persuaded his employer that it would be easier and pleasanter for him to take his ease at the camp and await their return.

The detective and the guide secured a supply of food from the stores that had been left by the thieves, and, with their rifles on their shoulders, trudged away down the bank of the river, as they were pleased to term the stream which they had ascended.

They started off at a rapid rate, the short legs of Terrapin Dick making as good time as the long limbs of his comrade.

As they walked so fast, and were not delayed by the necessity of seeking a trail, their progress was quite satisfactory to themselves.

"If Mr. Muldrow had come with us," remarked Ridsen, "he would soon have become disgusted with this sort of thing, and would have wished himself back at the camp."

"He never had no notion o' comin'," replied Hemlock Hank. "He only wants to put on airs and make bother. He is a mean, sneakin', sulky, surly, snarlin', ill-conditioned cur. The one thing he needs in this world is to be kicked into good manners, and that would take a mighty sight o' kickin'."

"Really, Hank, I knew that you didn't like the fellow, but had no idea that you had formed such a very poor opinion of him. It must have been growing on you."

"You bet it has. 'Tis said, Dick, that continual droppin' wears the stun, and I'm easier to wear than a stun. I've had enough of his naggin', and I meant to put a stop to it this mornin'."

"I hope you have succeeded. But I want you to go as easy as you can, old man. I kept my tongue out of the talk this morning, until I was afraid it might be carried too far. I thought it was best that you should have a blowing off, and that he should get a blowing up. But I hope you will try to get along with him, Hank. He is our employer, you know."

The tall logger shook his head at this view of the subject.

"Do you always respect the man who pays you, Dick?" he asked.

"Not by a long shot. But I try to show respect for him. That is business, you know. The world would never get on if everybody spoke his mind."

"I'm apt to speak mine, and that chap knows what it is, and I hope the knowledge will stick to him. Why, Dick Ridsen, the boss of a loggin' camp would never dare to give me half the slack I've had from that scruff."

"Like enough; but we came here to do a job of work, and we mustn't let any little thing interfere with us. Muldrow is sure to be a nuisance and a trial to our patience; but we can't help having him with us, and we ought to try to put up with him. That is all there is about it."

"All right," responded Hemlock Hank. "Let him behave half decently, and I won't worry him. But he has got his orders."

The two friends tramped industriously until noon, when they halted for a moment.

"Had we better stop and eat a bite?" inquired the detective. "We must feed the furnace, if the engine is to run."

"Not yet," replied Hank. "We can nibble crackers and such as we go. The Kanucks may make a noon halt, and there is a chance that we may come up on them."

They took up the tramp again, munching crackers as they went; but had gone only a little further when Hemlock Hank suddenly stopped, and laid his hand on his companion's arm.

"What is it?" demanded the detective.

"A skiff in the river. Don't you hear the sound of oars?"

Terrapin Dick listened intently, and was soon convinced that he did hear it.

"We are coming up on them," said he.

"Or they are comin' up on us."

"What do you mean?"

"It ain't likely that we'd ha' overhauled 'em this soon, and the sound seems to be drawin' this way."

"What does that mean?"

"Darned if I know. They can't have turned about. Mebbe it's somebody else. But we will soon know more about it."

"Let us hurry forward, then."

"No, Dick. What's the use o' runnin' arter su'thin' that's comin' toward you? We will drop down behind the bushes here, and wait for the skiff."

Soon there was no longer the slightest doubt that the skiff was coming up-stream, and after a little while they were gratified by a fair view of it as it came around a bend in the river.

It was a painted skiff, and the only occupant was the white man who handled the oars.

"That is our boat!" exclaimed Terrapin Dick.

"Sartin," responded his comrade. "Queer caper, this."

As they arose from their concealment—which they might well do, as the oarsman's back was toward them, they perceived that the skiff was followed at a little distance by another, rowed by an Indian.

They waited until the first skiff was nearly opposite to where they stood, when they cocked their rifles.

"Halt, there, and come ashore!" shouted the detective.

The oarsman ceased rowing, and half turned and looked at them.

A glance was sufficient to satisfy him.

"All right!" he answered. "No compulsion needed. Glad to meet you."

CHAPTER VIII.

A LION IN THE KANUCKS' PATH.

SOMETHING more than fifteen miles below the point where Terrapin Dick and his comrades had camped, and on the same bank of the same stream, there was another camp on the same night that witnessed the robbery up the river.

In dimensions and pretensions it was somewhat smaller than the camp above, and the campers numbered one man less.

The visible items of the outfit were a loaded skiff that was moored to the bank instead of being hauled up and overturned, a rubber shelter tent, and the usual smudge for the benefit of insects.

The human components were a white man and an Indian.

The white man was young, but heavily bearded, tall, athletic, and bronzed by exposure.

His handsome countenance was expressive of good nature, as well as of fearlessness and self-reliance.

His stout garments were admirably suited to forest life, but were those of the western plainsman, rather than those of the Maine logger.

He carried as his chief weapon a repeating rifle, which was evidently his pet and his pride.

The Indian was a partly civilized relic of one of the old Maine tribes, and his partial civilization had not added picturesqueness to his appearance, however it may have improved him otherwise.

An Indian who assumes the entire garments of civilization is unattractive enough; but when he mixes them up according to his own ideas of the fitness of things with those which he inherited from his ancestors, he becomes absolutely ugly.

This Indian was ugly, but good.

As a guide he was a valuable man, and he bore the reputation of being in every respect trustworthy and reliable.

His name was Neptune, and his white companion was addressed by him as Boss Ben, or Boss Lawson, but more frequently as Boss.

As night drew on, they were enjoying their pipes in the shelter of the smudge, where the smoke of the fir boughs mingled with that of their tobacco.

"Where you go now, Boss Ben?" inquired the Indian.

"I don't 'zactly know, Neptune. We will keep on up this stream as far as we can go, and after that it is all guesswork."

"Little ribber soon run dry," sententiously remarked Neptune.

"Yes—I doubt if we will be able to get much further. But that don't matter. As I said, it is all guesswork. Sometimes I half wish," continued Lawson, speaking to himself quite as much as to his companion, "that we had waited at Staley's tavern on the Penobscot. There was a man there who interested me. I mean the one who wore his beard so queer—shaved off at the chin, you know. I was sure I had seen him before, but for the life of me I could not place him. And when I was speaking about that Cranston murder, there was a strange look in his face, as if he knew all about it, and could tell a heap if he wanted to. Did you notice that, Neptune?"

"Hey? What?" grunted the Indian, as he started out of a reverie.

"On my soul I believe that you were not listening. Is that the kind of man you are? I was asking you if you had noticed that strange-looking man at Staley's."

"Plenty man at Staley's. Neptune no look much. Odder fish to fry."

"Other rum to drink, you had better say. Perhaps we did well not to stop at Staley's. Well, it is no matter. Let's turn in."

In the comradeship of forest life, which brings master and man to a level, they crept together under the small shelter tent, and doubtless slept soundly.

No prowling thieves molested them during the night, but an adventure awaited them in the morning.

They had taken a wash in the clear water of the stream, and Neptune was about to start a fire for breakfast, when Ben Lawson declared that he heard the sound of oars.

The Indian listened, and heard the sound distinctly.

It was traveling down the river, and the boat would soon reach them.

All other matters were laid aside, and they eagerly awaited the approach of the strangers—quite as eagerly as a strange sail at sea is overhauled and hailed, and with more curiosity.

Nearer drew the sounds of the oars, until a painted skiff came in view.

In it were seated three rough-looking and dark-featured men, two of whom were rowing, while the third was seated in the stern.

"Kanucks!" at once exclaimed Neptune.

"Big t'ief. Steal boat."

"Are you sure of that?" demanded Lawson.

"Sartin. Kanuck nebber hab boat. Dam big t'ief. Steal eb'ryting."

"Then we must take their plunder from them."

"Kotch 'um quick!" responded the Indian, who evidently bore no good will toward the Canadians.

The two men stepped forth upon the bank of the stream, and Lawson, holding his repeating-rifle ready for action, hailed the approaching party.

"Hello, there! Row that skiff in here!"

The Canadians stopped rowing, and stared in amazement at the men on the bank.

Then they started to row the skiff in toward the shore; but it was the opposite shore.

As the stream was but some thirty yards wide, they might soon reach it.

"Do you hear me?" shouted Lawson. "Bring that skiff in here, or you will get hurt."

Still they made no motion to obey his order.

"You man in the stern! mind what I say, or you get a hole in your arm."

As this produced no effect, the rifle cracked, and the man in the stern jumped up with a yell.

He clapped his right hand upon his left arm, and his face was contorted with a quizzical expression of surprise and pain.

Then he jumped overboard, and his companions hastily followed him.

As the water was hardly waist deep, they easily made their way to the shore, where they disappeared among the bushes.

Ben Lawson cast loose his own skiff, and jumped in, followed by Neptune, who took the oars.

"Pull out and catch that skiff," ordered the white man, "and I will watch those cowardly coyotes, to see that they don't back-cap us from the bushes."

The skiff was easily secured and brought to the shore, where Ben Lawson examined it, finding it well loaded with provisions and other articles.

He soon found indications that gave him a sufficient clew to the ownership of the craft.

Some packages were marked with the name of Julius Muldrow, and an envelope in the bottom of the skiff was addressed to Richard H. Ridsen.

"Why, Nep," said Ben Lawson, "we have made a lucky find. This property belongs to some friends of mine. That is, I know who they are. They must have camped above us on this stream, and the Kanucks sneaked on them at night. We will start up the river with their skiff after breakfast, and it is likely that we will meet them before we go far."

Ben Lawson's prediction was fulfilled in due course of time.

Rowing the captured skiff, he preceded Neptune in his own skiff, and pulled steadily but slowly up-stream, until he was greeted with a hail that ordered him to halt and come ashore.

Glancing over his shoulder, he saw on the bank of the stream a tall and grizzled man, with a younger one who was short and thick-set.

Answering the hail pleasantly, he rowed ashore at once, stepped out, and made the skiff fast.

"Do you know that that's our boat, stranger?" demanded the short man.

"I thought it was," mildly answered Lawson. "Unless I am mistaken in the men, I am sure of it."

"How did you come by it, then?" inquired the long man.

"Hold on, Hank!" said the other. "Our friend here is all right. I think I know him. Yes, I am sure I do. He is the man I told you about, who stood lawyer Allyn on his head in Cranston. Oh, yes, I know young Stand-him-on-his-head, and am glad to meet him here."

"Seems to me that I know him, too," chimed in Hemlock Hank. "Darned if it ain't Ben Lawson, who logged it with me part of a winter up the Megalloway. Have you forgotten me, boy?"

"I will never be likely to forget Hemlock Hank," answered Lawson.

Neptune came ashore with the other skiff, and the story of the dispersion of the Kanucks and the capture of the stolen craft was speedily told.

"We are immensely obliged to you, Mr. Lawson," said Terrapin Dick. "Perhaps we may serve you a good turn some time. Shouldn't wonder a bit if we might. Will you go with us back to our camp?"

"Don't care if I do," replied Lawson, "as I am bound in that direction. But I can't stop there any time."

"Why not? We would be pleased to have you stop as long as you will."

"Julius Muldrow is with you, I believe."

"What of that?"

"He and I don't exactly forgather, you know."

"But you needn't fight."

"I should hope not, Mr. Ridsen, for his sake. But there is a coolness that might be unpleasant, and we like each other best at a distance."

"Come along, then, and you will be heartily welcome while you do stay."

Terrapin Dick and Hemlock Hank took possession of the captured skiff, while Ben Lawson and Neptune rowed their own craft.

They pulled vigorously, and reached the camp where Julius Muldrow had been left a little before nightfall.

There they saw a sight which at first amazed them, and then drew roars of laughter from the entire party.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW JULIUS WAS TREED.

JULIUS MULDROW chuckled when the detective and the guides had left him, congratulating himself upon the fact that it was not he who was to take a long and tedious tramp in search of the missing property.

He cooked for himself the best breakfast that he could prepare, and took his time at eating it.

Then he smoked a cigar, and consumed as much time as possible in that enjoyment.

Then he began to discover that the morning hours were long, and that he was very poor company for himself.

It was the first time he had been left alone since the party had been out, and the silence and solitude of the forest produced a feeling of oppression, if not one that was more nearly allied to fear.

The lack of somebody to quarrel with deprived him of one of the chief pleasures of his existence, and the lack of somebody to protect him in case of danger filled him with uneasiness.

He had no doubt that there was cause to apprehend danger.

Thieves had visited the camp at night, and other marauders might be prowling about.

The morning passed very slowly and in a most unsatisfactory manner.

When noon arrived, the young man had become so restless and nervous that he would not build a fire to cook his dinner, for fear of attracting enemies.

So he picked up an unsavory meal of crackers and canned meat, which was not improved by the addition of warm river-water.

Then he devoted as much time as possible to

the slow consumption of a cigar, but derived little consolation from his smoke.

After that he occupied himself with going to the river-bank every few minutes, looking downstream for his comrades, and listening for the sound of oars.

But this availed nothing except to increase his restlessness and make his situation more unbearable.

He wondered why they did not come back, or if they would ever return to him.

The remembrance of his quarrel with Hank Ward in the morning inspired him with a fear that they might be tempted to desert him.

He wished that he had gone with them. It seemed to him then that the toilsome tramp in search of the thieves would not have been anything like as bad as his weary hours of waiting at the camp.

The proverb about the pitcher that goes often to the well finds daily verification in many ways.

Julius Muldrow went to the bank of the river once too often.

He omitted to take his rifle with him, and from that piece of carelessness ensued a calamity.

He stayed there quite a while, anxiously looking down the stream, muttering curses on the tardiness of his companions and the rascally thieves who had caused their absence.

As he turned at last to go back to the tent, he discovered an obstacle in the way.

It was a very serious obstacle—nothing less than a big bear, nearly black in color, whose thick coat was entirely too heavy for the hot weather, the effects of which he showed plainly.

He was panting as he stood there, with his mouth wide open and his tongue hanging out; but at the same time he seemed to be quite lively and aggressive.

The bear had been making a tour of inspection over the camping-ground, and had not noticed the presence of a biped until the young man started away from the river.

Then he determined to inspect the biped.

Julius Muldrow did not desire any closer acquaintance with his visitor, and had no idea of staying there to be inspected; but what should he do?

It was impossible to show fight, as the bear was between him and his rifle.

He could only run up or down the river, and in so doing would be liable to be cut off by Bruin, who doubtless could get over ground quite as rapidly as he could.

If he should take to the stream, Bruin was not afraid of water, and would be ready enough to follow him.

Luckily there was a tall young ash tree at the water's edge right behind him, and in that direction he turned and ran when the bear started toward him.

Bruin picked up his feet pretty fast when he perceived that the biped was endeavoring to escape; but Julius ran well, reached the tree in good time, and began to scramble up.

Though the trunk was small enough for him to clasp it with his arms and legs, it was smooth, and he found it hard work to shin up, especially as he was not accustomed to climbing.

But necessity often forces mortals to perform unusual feats, and the scratching of the bear on the tree below him compelled Julius to climb for all he was worth.

He reached the first limb of the ash in a nearly exhausted condition, threw a leg over it, and hung there to rest.

It was some minutes before he recovered breath enough to be able to draw himself up to a more comfortable position, from which he looked down upon his adversary.

Master Bruin was seated at the foot of the tree, looking up hungrily, but had evidently come to the conclusion that the weather was too hot for him to attempt the ascent.

Julius Muldrow was so angry at being placed in such an unpleasant position, that he hastened to take such revenge as he could get.

He had retained his revolver, which he pointed at the brute, and fired at him twice.

Bruin looked up reproachfully as the pellets struck him, as if to protest against the advantage that was taken of him, but made no further demonstration, except to shake his head and scratch it as if a gadfly had bitten him.

Another shot caused him to rise and walk away slowly until he was out of range.

The dignity of a self-respecting bear would not allow him to remain there to afford amusement to such a puny adversary.

He had the biped safely treed, and was at leisure to continue his inspection of the deserted camp.

He found very little there that suited his fancy.

There were a few cans of provisions in sight; but they were not opened, and he could make nothing of them.

He found some crackers, which he munched at his leisure; but they were too dry eating.

After sniffing around a while he approached the tent and cautiously entered it.

This was his adversary's opportunity.

As the bear was out of sight, Julius saw a

chance to climb down the tree and regain possession of his rifle.

But he had got hardly half-way down when Bruin bounced out of the tent with a growl, and made a savage rush at him, and he was forced to climb up to his perch.

The bear went back, and amused himself with tearing to pieces a few articles of woolen and cotton that were lying about, and with making a rather too critical examination of Muldrow's rifle.

Then he returned to the river, and stationed himself near the ash tree, as if waiting for his two-legged pear to drop.

To Julius Muldrow the situation was momentarily becoming more unpleasant and painful.

He had anything but a comfortable perch among the scanty limbs of the ash, and was compelled to change his position continually, in order to keep from being too much cramped or strained.

There was evidently a limit to his ability to remain in the tree, and the question was whether he would get relief before that limit was reached.

The prospect of relief was very remote just then, and the more he thought of it the more improbable it seemed that help should come to him.

His comrades had gone on a long chase, and, as they would not be likely to come back while there was a chance of succeeding in their pursuit, it might be a long time before they would come in sight of that ash tree.

Where would he be then?

The open jaws and lolling tongue of the waiting bear seemed to furnish a ready answer to that question.

He fired a few pistol-shots at the brute, hoping to drive him away, but only succeeded in persuading Bruin to move a little further from the tree.

The sun set at last, and despair was stealing with the twilight over the heart of the prisoner on his perch, when he was suddenly sure that he heard the welcome sound of oars.

It was the sweetest music he had ever listened to, and when, shortly after, he also heard the sound of men's voices, his joy was so rapturous that he nearly fell from his perch.

The sounds unquestionably came from down the river, and they rapidly drew nearer, until he saw first one skiff and then another, as they were pulled toward him by strong arms.

He easily recognized Dick Ridsen and Hank Ward as the occupants of the first skiff; but who were in the other?

"It mattered not; whoever they might be, he would soon be rescued from his painful and perilous predicament."

As they approached the shore one of them looked up and ahead, and saw the young man in the tree.

He called the attention of the others to the sight, and at the same time they saw the bear seated at a little distance from the ash tree.

The spectacle struck them as so exceedingly comical, that they burst into hearty roars of laughter, which did not tend to make the man in the tree feel any better.

But he put as good a face on the matter as he could, and answered their laughter quite cheerfully.

"Laugh away!" he shouted. "You wouldn't laugh if you were where I am; but you've got the best of it down there. Whatever else you do, for God's sake kill this bear right away."

As the men landed from the boats the bear began to beat a retreat; but he was not allowed to get off so easily.

Their deadly rifles soon made an end of him, and Julius Muldrow was glad enough to climb down the tree.

CHAPTER X.

A TERRIBLE CATASTROPHE.

JUDGE MEACHAM, formerly of the Supreme Court of Maine, but at the time of this tale a lawyer in good practice, was one of the most enthusiastic hunters in the State.

Though he was on the shady side of fifty, and was growing corpulent, his advancing age and other impediments did not diminish his fondness for woodland life and the sports of hunting and fishing.

He loved to get as far as possible beyond the verge of civilization, and, accompanied only by one guide, to follow his favorite occupations in the wildest and most remote districts of his native State.

Striking the region of the chain of big lakes near the Penobscot shortly after Dick Ridsen and his party reached the head of skiff navigation on the stream they were following, he proposed to tarry thereabout for awhile, as game and fish were plentiful, but with the intention of making his way further north into the untrodden wilderness.

One sultry noon found him and his guide encamped on the south shore of a lovely lake, preparing their mid-day meal under the shade of the giant trees.

His guide, who had been his close companion and trusted friend on several similar excursions, was a bright young American named Steve Hollis.

In the preparation of dinner Steve played a secondary part, his duty being to wait on his principal, who always officiated as chief cook.

The judge prided himself, and quite justly, on his performances in that line, boasting that no man could surpass him in the concoction of a dainty meal in the forest from the materials provided by his gun and rod.

He had a flat-bottomed canoe, light, but strong and roomy, which had been built specially for his purposes, in which were snugly stowed a variety of articles for culinary uses.

He manipulated them so skillfully, and with such a deep interest in the important work, that the meals he prepared would have been a delight to the daintiest epicure, to say nothing of men whose appetites were sharpened by the air and exercise of the wilderness.

On this occasion he was to cook a brace of magnificent ducks, with some marvelous gridle-cakes of which he claimed to be the inventor.

Steve Hollis had picked and cleaned one of the ducks, and was at work on the other, stopping every now and then to wait on the judge, who was deep in the mysteries of his art, and required a great deal of attention.

So intently were they occupied—Judge Meacham requiring his companion's mind as well as his own to be concentrated on the cookery—that they failed to notice the singular and startling atmospheric changes that were rapidly taking place.

The sky had become obscured, and the leaden-hued mass of clouds was undergoing some striking transformations.

Around the horizon, and especially toward the southeast, the clouds were of a greenish-yellow, shading up to a bottle green, and then to a lurid purple, mixed with streaks and splotches of crimson.

After awhile they broke and mingled, and all the masses in that quarter seemed to be hurrying to a common center.

"How dark it is getting to be!" exclaimed Steve Hollis, as he looked up from the duck he was picking.

"Never mind that," petulantly replied Judge Meacham. "Hurry up with the bird. I am ready for it now."

"I am afraid that you can't cook it yet awhile, judge. There is going to be a storm."

The judge looked up at the sky, and shook his head sadly.

"That's a fact," said he. "We must have been too busy to notice the weather. We are going to have rain, Steve, and it may prove a drencher. We must postpone our dinner, and put these things away under the tent."

"I am afraid it is going to be something worse than rain," remarked the guide.

"Dear me! You don't say! Rain would be bad enough, just at dinner-time, and what could be worse?"

"A harrycane."

"I hope not, indeed. I was on the edge of one of those things once, and I confess that I was scared. I don't want to see any more such performances."

Hollis was gazing through the trees at that point in the sky where the clouds seemed to be hurrying to a central point, about which they whirled until they assumed the shape of a gigantic funnel.

Anything more ominous and threatening than the atmospheric conditions at that moment it would be hard to imagine.

"It's comin', judge," said Steve—"a reg'lar old-fashioned harrycane. Lord help the place where it strikes! I hope it won't be this place."

"Well, Steve, we needn't fret, as we can't tell where it will strike or what it will do. There's no use in running, as we could never get out of its way, and we can only stand and take what is sent to us. Anyhow, we had better carry these things into the tent away from the rain."

This task was soon finished, and they came out from the tent and looked again at the threatening sky.

It had then ceased to threaten, as the wild work of the storm was begun.

Before they could get a good look at the scene, the hurricane was upon them.

First came a terrific peal of thunder, with lightning that seemed to fill the air with fire.

Then there was a deafening roar, advancing with frightful rapidity, accompanied by the noise of falling trees and breaking branches.

The next moment they were in the midst of the cyclone, swallowed up by it and as incapable of helping themselves as if they were being carried over Niagara.

All around them great trees were falling, and the air was full of dust and smoke and flying undergrowth and leaves and fragments of broken limbs.

Through all this the roaring of the cyclone was a sound to itself, and its passage was accompanied by a strong and oppressive sulphurous smell.

If the men who were caught in it could have seen it, or if they had been fairly in possession of any of their senses, they would have pronounced it a terribly magnificent demonstration of the irresistible forces of nature, before which

man is as powerless as thistledown in a gale of wind.

But they had no more conscious knowledge of what was actually happening than if they had been suddenly struck on the head with clubs and knocked senseless.

It was all ended in a twinkling, and the whirlwind swept over the lake, where it raised a great commotion in the water.

Then it broke, and its forces seemed to melt away and dissipate.

It was succeeded by a heavy and drenching shower of rain, as if the bottom had been knocked out of a big reservoir up above.

The camp and the forest to the south of it were so changed as to be quite beyond recognition, the trees for a space of some two hundred yards in width having been entirely prostrated, and the edges of the windfall were as clearly defined as the swath of a mower.

Judge Meacham was immediately stricken down and borne to the ground by a tree that fell upon him, and his consciousness deserted him.

The drenching rain brought his senses back to him, and he extricated himself with some difficulty from under the tree that fastened him to the ground.

To his great delight he discovered that, though he seemed to be bruised all over, no bones were broken, and no internal injuries had been sustained.

His first impulse was to fall on his knees and offer fervent thanks for his remarkable and merciful preservation.

Then he looked around for his companion, but could see nothing of him.

It was possible, though not at all probable, that Steve Hollis might have been pinned under a tree as he had been, thus escaping serious injury.

Judge Meacham was so surrounded and beset by fallen trees and broken limbs and debris, that he saw no chance to make a search for his guide, and could only use his voice.

If Steve should prove to be alive, and something should be heard from him, his whereabouts might be discovered, and an effort might be made to rescue him.

The judge's voice sounded faintly at first, as if it had been shocked out of him; but he soon recovered it, and called loudly.

"Steve! Steve Hollis! Are you alive? Can you answer me?"

There was no answer—no sound in the midst of the desolation but the pattering of the rain, which had then subsided to a gentle shower.

"Steve! For God's sake answer me if you can! Give some sign to let me know that you are alive!"

There was an answering hail of "Hello!" but it came from an unexpected quarter, and the voice was not that of Steve Hollis.

CHAPTER XI.

ASTONISHING THE SANDERS FAMILY.

JUDGE MEACHAM looked in the direction from which the sound proceeded, and saw there a dwarfish and misshapen lad, who had mounted on the trunk of a fallen tree, so that he was plainly visible.

"Hello, mister!" shouted the lad, in a voice that was remarkably shrill. "Was you in that smash-up?"

"Yes," answered the judge. "I came through alive; but there was a man with me who has not fared so well, I am afraid. Can you come over here and help me look for him?"

The lad hurried over the tangled mass of the windfall with wonderful dexterity and agility, now climbing over the trunk of a tree, then diving under another, and again performing acrobatic feats in getting through piles of broken limbs that opposed him like *chevaux de frise*.

When he reached Judge Meacham he was nearly breathless; but a brief rest restored him, and he proceeded to make the search under the direction of the judge.

As nothing was heard from the guide in answer to repeated calls, the inference was that he was dead; and that they could only hope to recover his body.

It was by accident rather than otherwise that Steve Hollis was finally found.

It seemed that he must have had an idea of the probable course of the tornado, as he had started to run across its track, and had nearly reached the edge of the windfall when he was stricken dead by a heavy tree that crashed down upon him.

His body was terribly mangled, and his death must have been instantaneous.

The next thing necessary was for Judge Meacham to get out of the tangle.

He had been slowly and with difficulty working his way toward the edge, and with the help of the lad he finally emerged, at a point not far from the body of his guide and friend.

The first thing he did was to examine curiously and critically the lad who had come to his assistance, and the latter bore the inspection quite good-naturedly.

"What is your name, sonny?" asked the judge.

"Abner Sanders, sir."

"How did you come here?"

"I was just floatin' around, and happened to be here when the whirler struck. That's all."

"Well, Abner, it is lucky for me that you turned up as you did, and if you will stay with me and help me as much as you can, I promise you that you shall lose nothing by it."

"I'll stick to you fur all I'm worth, whether I lose by it or not," answered Abner.

"Good boy. I suppose you have some friends somewhere hereabout?"

"I live five or six miles from here, I guess."

"That is all right, and you won't have to hurry home, I guess. I wish you would help me hunt an ax, so that we can get poor Hollis's body out of that tangle."

The investigation that ensued enabled Judge Meacham to realize the extent of his misfortune, which was as complete as it could be, except that he had received no serious personal injury.

His canoe, which had been moored at the shore of the lake, was an utter wreck.

A tree had fallen upon it from the main land, demolishing it completely, and leaving nothing in sight but the painter and a portion of the bow end.

The ax was found, and Judge Meacham and the boy succeeded, with considerable difficulty, in extricating the body of Steve Hollis.

When it was laid under the trees, out of the way of the windfall, the judge burst into tears.

"Seems like you was fond of him, mister?" remarked the lad.

"I was very fond of him. He has been my close friend for three years. He was one of the best and truest men that ever lived. Oh, Steve! how shall I tell this to your poor old mother? But there is no time for grief; we can only bury him, my boy."

With the ax and some cooking utensils a grave was dug in the soft earth near the shore of the lake.

Not a scrap of the tent could be found to serve as a shroud, but the body was carefully covered with spruce boughs before the grave was filled in.

It was sunset when the judge had driven two blazed stakes to mark the grave, and it behooved him to decide what he should do with himself.

"Now, Abner," said he, "I will go home with you, if you will let me, and rest there until I can go to Staley's or some other place on the river."

Abner, who had taken a great liking to the old gentleman, was delighted with this proposition.

"It is getting late, though," remarked Judge Meacham, "and it will be bad traveling in the dark."

"That don't count," eagerly replied the boy.

"I could take you there as straight as a bee-line, if it was as dark as a load o' charcoal."

"Very well, then. We will jog along. There is a lot of provisions and other stuff, Abner, where the boat is sunk, and scattered about here. Your folks will be welcome to what they can find, if they care to come after it."

The judge had found his rifle, which was fortunately uninjured, and he shouldered it and followed Abner, who started off at a rapid pace, but soon moderated his gait to suit that of his companion.

It was night when they reached the gap that led to the home of the Sanders family.

Boney, who was on guard, received them with a growl, which quickly changed to expressions of ursine satisfaction as he heard the well-known voice of Abner.

The lad led the guest into the basin and direct to the cabin, where his father and his brother Dave were seated, meditating and smoking their pipes.

Nick Sanders was also there when they arrived; but he disappeared around the corner of the house at the approach of a stranger.

His trepidation was increased when he heard that stranger introduce himself as Judge Meacham.

The thief, we are told, fears in every bush an officer, and so does the word judge have a frightful import to a man who has gone wrong.

"I have hunted in this part of the country for several years, Mr. Sanders," said Judge Meacham. "Perhaps you have heard of me."

Ike Sanders had heard of him, and was very glad to meet him.

"We hain't had no supper, dad," quietly remarked Abner.

"Mammy!" yelled Ike Sanders. "Stir up su'thin' of the best you've got, and cook it quick. Here's Judge Meacham and Abner, both hungry."

There was no response; but he knew that "Mammy" would do everything that needed to be done, and so he gave Judge Meacham a seat, and settled himself back for a friendly talk.

Judge Meacham gave a brief but vivid account of his trouble with the tornado on the lake shore, and did not fail to give Abner all the

credit that was his due for his timely arrival and intelligent assistance.

"Seems like Abner ain't no sort of a slouch," observed uncle Ike. "We have had it among us that the boy ain't more'n half-witted; but he can do things that the rest of us can't begin to do, and somehow he always happens to be in the right place at the right time."

"He happened around at the right time for me," replied Judge Meacham. "If it had not been for him, I would have been in a bad pickle to-night, and might have been hunting yet for the body of poor Steve Hollis."

"And so Steve Hollis has gone ahead of us—so young and active and full of life as he was. I never saw much of him, but always heard a good name given him."

"Yes, he is dead, and we buried him there by the lake. It was all I could do. By the way, Mr. Sanders, you will find quite a pile of stuff, if you care to look for it, about my camp, and where my canoe was sunk, and you will be welcome to it if you will go and get it."

"Thank you, judge. I will go over there with Dave in the mornin' and look it up, or send Nick. Where is Nick, anyhow? He was here a bit ago."

"He scooted, dad, as soon as the judge and Abner came," replied Dave Sanders.

"That's queer. I want to know what is the matter with him."

Uncle Ike immediately got up and sought his nephew, whom he found concealed behind the corner of the log-house, listening intently to the conversation at the front.

"What is the matter with you, Nick?" demanded his uncle. "What are you sneaking away like this for?"

"I was scared, uncle Ike," answered Nick.

"What were you scared about?"

"I heard that stranger tell you that he is Judge Meacham. Since the trouble I had down yander I'm afeard o' judges, and want to keep out of the way of that sort."

"You are a fool, Nick Sanders. This judge ain't a judge now, and if he was you are out of his reach. Do you suppose he could pick you up and try you and hang you right here and now? Nonsense!"

"But I'm afeard of him, uncle, and don't want to see him."

Ike Sanders went back to the front of the house, with a look on his face that denoted amusement, and at the same time perplexity.

"That nephew of mine," said he, "has got less sense than Thompson's colt. He got into a scrape down the country, Judge Meacham, and he is afraid that you have come here to try him and hang him, or at least shove him into State prison."

"I am sorry for that," answered the judge. "I could not trouble him if I wanted to, and I am sure that I don't want to. I would do nothing to worry any of your folks, Mr. Sanders, if I had the power to. Please tell him that, and assure him that I am not at all dangerous."

It was Abner who then hunted up his cousin Nick, and told him what their guest had said, and explained to him that Judge Meacham was a very nice and friendly old gentleman.

So Abner brought his cousin forward, and Nick, looking quite shamefaced, took a seat with the rest.

"I understand, my young friend," observed Judge Meacham with a smile, "that you are afraid of me; but you have no cause to be. Suppose you tell me about the scrape you got into, and perhaps I can show you a way out of it."

"It was a case of stealin'," said Ike Sanders, as Nick showed no disposition to speak. "The young man was workin' for an old lady named Jardine, at a town called Cranston, and he took advantage of his chances there to steal her gold watch and a hundred dollars in money. Hold up your head, Nick, and don't run away. An honest confession is good for the soul. He was caught at it, and he gave up what he had taken, and the old lady let him off with a caution that he musn't do so any more. But somebody else got after him, and scared him away, and Nick came up here to us. That's all there is about it, judge, and it don't seem to be no sort of a killin' matter."

Judge Meacham made no answer.

He was sitting with his head bowed down, and a heavy frown on his brow, looking intently at Nick Sanders.

"What's the matter, judge?" asked uncle Ike.

"I wish, Mr. Sanders," he slowly replied, "that what you have told me were indeed all. I wish for your sake and the sake of your family, that there were nothing worse."

"Nothin' worse? Why, Judge Meacham, what do you mean? Has the boy been lyin' to us? What is it that he has done that's wuss'n stealin'?"

"Murder!" solemnly replied Judge Meacham.

"Murder!" exclaimed each of his listeners, and of them all not one seemed to be more astonished and horrified than was Nick.

"I understand," continued the judge, "that this young man is Nick Sanders, who worked for Mrs. Jardine in Cranston. If so, he is the man who murdered Mrs. Jardine."

CHAPTER XII.

JUDGE MEACHAM'S DISCOVERIES.

To say that Ike Sanders and his family were astonished by Judge Meacham's statement would be to put the case too mildly.

They were horrified, shocked, almost stunned by that unexpected and terrible revelation.

Nick Sanders was the first to find his tongue, and his face as well as his words spoke of his painful surprise.

"Murdered?" he exclaimed. "Mrs. Jardine murdered? Do you mean to say that the old lady is dead?"

"Dead and buried long ago," replied the judge, "and you are the man who is accused of murdering her."

"That's what I heard you say; but I can't seem to get it through me, somehow. I am free to say, judge, that I am clear of that, whatever else I have done. I've been bad enough, Lord knows, but never within a thousand miles of that. Why, judge, I wouldn't hurt a fly, much less a human crittur, unless I was forced to. Tell me how she was killed, and how they came to pitch on me as the murderer."

"I know nothing about it except what I have read in the papers. She was found dead in her bed, and had evidently been strangled. Those who wrote about it had no doubt that you were the murderer, as that was the general belief in Cranston."

"When was she found dead?—what day?—what morning?"

"It was a Saturday morning."

"And it was early Friday night that I left there, and the old lady was then alive and well. I saw her sitting at a table, reading by the light of a lamp, just before I went away."

"If your statement is true," remarked Judge Meacham, "there is an unexplored mystery in the case."

"If I ever spoke the truth in my life, judge, I'm speakin' it now. I never knew that Mrs. Jardine was dead until you told me."

"Is there anybody who knows when you left Cranston? or anybody who met you that night, who can prove that you were not at Mrs. Jardine's?"

Nick shook his head.

"Not a person," he answered. "I kept out of the way of everybody, and didn't see a soul until the next day, when I was far from Cranston."

"That makes it look bad for you. But there must be a break in the clouds somewhere. Suppose you tell me why you ran away, and everything else you can think of. Perhaps I may see a streak of light."

Nick Sanders proceeded to tell his entire story, making, as he said, a clean breast of everything connected with his sojourn at Cranston and his departure from the village.

In this he of course included the scare that Julius Muldrow put upon him, and the advice and assistance of that young gentleman which caused him to run away.

Judge Meacham cross-questioned him at various parts of the story, and used the arts of a lawyer to tangle him up and cause him to contradict himself; but Nick stuck to a plain, straightforward tale, and did not vary from it in any particular.

"This is a queer piece of business," said the judge, "but I am inclined to believe, Mrs. Sanders, that your nephew is telling the truth. I have had a great deal of experience with criminals and witnesses, and I generally know whether a man is giving me a straight story or not. I think your nephew's story is straight. But appearances are against him at present, and there is another bad feature of the business. I understand that Miss Mary Payson, a young lady who lived with Miss Jardine, has been accused of being his confederate in the murder. That is to say, they accuse her of having put him up to the deed."

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Nick. "The meanest and blackest of lies! Miss Mary is nothin' less than an angel, and she couldn't have loved her own mother better than she loved the old lady. If they talk about her in that way, I will go down there and face them for her sake."

"You've got to go there, anyhow," asserted uncle Ike. "Judge Meacham thinks you're innocent, and so do I; but this thing has got to be met. Whether you are guilty or not, you must face this thing. If you won't go down of your own accord, I will tie you and take you there."

"Go easy, friend Sanders," interposed Judge Meacham. "Go easy, and don't try to hurry things. I tell you that as I look at the matter now, I am inclined to believe that your nephew is innocent. But many innocent men are sent to State prison, or even hanged, because appearances are against them. If your nephew should go there now, he would have no chance. In my opinion there is some mystery connected with that murder, which needs to be cleared up. I will make it a point to go to Cranston as soon as I get into the neighborhood, and will look into the matter. You had better keep the young man where he is until you hear from me."

As Judge Meacham showed quite a friendly interest in the Sanders family, and as his opinion, as far as he had seen into the matter, was friendly to Nick, it was decided that his advice

should be followed, and that Nick should remain in hiding until more light could be thrown on his case.

"It seems to me now," remarked the judge, "that there is some mystery connected with that matter, and I mean to get to the bottom of it if I can. If I make any discoveries, Mr. Sanders, I will write to you, and send the letter to Staley's."

"All right, judge. Some of us will be goin' there now and then."

Supper was ready, and it was welcome to both Judge Meacham and Abner, as was also the night's rest that followed it.

In the morning the judge had a favor to ask of his hosts, who positively refused to take any pay for his entertainment.

"My hunting trip is broken up for this year," said he. "Not only is poor Steve Hollis dead, but my boat is wrecked, and I am all broken up. There is nothing for me to do now but to go home, and I think that if I can get to Staley's it will not be long before I can find some way to go down the river. What I want is a guide to Staley's, and I was thinking, Mr. Sanders, that Abner might serve my purpose as well as another."

"Of course he can, judge. The boy will guide you there as well as any man, and I guess he will be glad of the chance."

Abner was more than satisfied, and he and Judge Meacham set off together, after the old gentleman had said good-by to the hospitable people who had entertained him in the wilderness.

At the same time Dave Sanders and Nick started toward the lake to get what could be recovered from the wreck there.

It was a long tramp through the woods to Staley's, made longer by the circuitous route that was necessary to avoid the congeries of lakes; but Judge Meacham was a sturdy walker, and Abner was a lad who scarcely knew what it was to get tired.

They beguiled the way with talk of the forest and its denizens and the various ways and means of getting on in the woods, and the liking which the old gentleman had formed for Abner increased upon acquaintance.

"There is a good deal of come out to you, my lad," said he. "If any people tell you that you haven't got good sense, just refer them to me, and I will convince them to the contrary."

It was near nightfall when they reached Staley's, a log tavern on the west side of the Penobscot, which was kept as a house of entertainment for loggers, prospectors, hunters and the like, as well as a depot for supplies.

Abner was of course obliged to pass the night at Staley's; but that had been calculated on, and the best the place afforded was provided for him.

In the morning, when the lad was ready to start for home, Judge Meacham took him aside, and showed him his rifle, which had been spared by the tornado.

It was a repeating rifle, of the latest pattern and of fine workmanship—a very valuable weapon, as well as a light one and easy to manage.

"Now, Abner," said the old gentleman, "I am going to give you this rifle, and you have got to take it. I owe much to your family for their kindness, but most of all to you, who came to me when I was in sore need of help. This rifle is to be yours, and you are to keep it in remembrance of me."

The lad's eyes glistened; but he hesitated to take the gift.

"Mebbe dad might not want me to have it," he objected.

"But I want you to have it. I have a reason for not wishing to keep this rifle, and I like you. So you must have it, and your father may say what he pleases when I am gone. I will show you how to work it, and will give you the cartridges I have about me. Your folks will probably find plenty more in the lake, as they were in a water-tight box, and will be in good condition."

Anything prouder than Abner Sanders was when he marched away from Staley's with Judge Meacham's rifle on his shoulder, it would be hard to imagine, and the judge smiled as he watched the lad's departure.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN.

THE stay of Ben Lawson with the party whose skiff he had recovered from the thieves was but a brief one.

Julius Muldrow developed such a feeling of hostility toward him that the guest soon had to decide between a fight and a flight.

The symptoms showed themselves as soon as Julius had descended from the tree and taken a full view of the situation.

"I am glad that you got the boat at last," said he, "though you were long enough about it. I see that you have caught the thieves, too."

"What do you mean by that?" angrily demanded Terrapin Dick. "That remark of yours was made out of pure meanness. You surely know this gentleman, Mr. Ben Lawson,

and you know that he is not a thief. He and his guide stopped the thieves and rescued our property from them, and they were coming up the river in search of us when we met them. If it had not been for them, we would have lost the boat, or would have had a much longer chase after it, and then the beast that lies there would have had a chance to try his teeth on you. You may thank Ben Lawson for saving your life."

"Was that the way of it?" sneeringly replied Julius. "That is what you were told, I suppose. What is he doing up here, anyhow?"

"Well, really, Mr. Muldrow, that don't seem to me to be any of our business. Mr. Lawson has as good a right to be in the woods as we have, and he has done us a great favor. If you don't see fit to recognize it, the less said about it the better."

Ben Lawson and Neptune camped with the others that night, and stayed until after breakfast in the morning.

By that time the sneers and insinuations of Julius Muldrow had become so annoying that Lawson was compelled to choose, as has been said, between a fight and a flight.

He preferred the latter alternative.

But, before he went away, he gave Muldrow a parting shot.

"You have been so insolent to me since I came here," said he, "that I ought to give you a sound thrashing. But I don't want to have any kind of a difficulty with you or anybody else. So I will go away from here, and leave you to the company of your conscience, if you have one."

Julius scowled savagely at Ben Lawson as he and Neptune headed their skiff down-stream and passed out of sight.

"That fellow had better not meddle with me," he muttered, "or he will get into trouble."

Hemlock Hank stared at the speaker.

"What in thunder are you made of?" demanded the guide. "You are by all odds the meanest man I ever met, and I don't believe you have a drop of decent blood in your veins. You had better not fool with Ben Lawson. He can chew you up as easy as that bear could have done."

Terrapin Dick was so disgusted with the conduct of his employer, that he informed Hank Ward that he would be obliged to take a solitary hunt in order to cool off and recover his mental balance.

"At the same time," said he, "I shall scout around to see if I can find any sort of a trail in this vicinity. I suppose I can, trust you with Muldrow, Hank. You won't eat him while I am away."

"Not a taste," replied the guide. "He is too nasty for that, and I guess he understands that he has got to behave himself decently where I am."

The detective was not much of a hunter, or was not taking much interest in hunting that morning.

He strolled listlessly through the forest, apparently occupied with his own thoughts, rather than with the pursuit of game.

The result was that when the hour of noon arrived he had shot nothing, and would have been willing to declare that there was nothing in the woods worth shooting.

He had reached the shore of a lovely lake, which seemed to him to be a good place to stop and eat his midday lunch.

But something interfered to prevent him from carrying that intention into effect.

There came out of the woods, and slowly advanced toward him, an animal which he at once recognized as a wildcat.

It was necessary to get rid of the intruder if he was to enjoy his meal unmolested, and he cocked his rifle to shoot it.

The beast at once ran up a tree, doubtless intending to make a spring from the branches.

Risden saw its brown body and shining eyes, and fired at it in time.

The wildcat was hit, and it sent forth a fearful scream as it lost its hold on the branches and came tumbling to the ground.

It was not killed, but was still capable of mischief, though badly wounded.

Suddenly answering yells were heard from various quarters of the forest, and a timid spectator would have sworn that the woods were full of wildcats.

There were surely enough of them—more than Terrapin Dick cared to see.

It occurred to him that he had discovered a menagerie—that he had stirred up a nest of wildcats.

One after another they emerged from the depths of the forest, until he counted five of them, running, leaping, lashing their tails, and all heading direct for the man who had dared to intrude on the convention which they had probably been holding near the spot.

It was a serious business for Dick Risden.

There were more of them than he was willing or able to tackle.

He had hastened to reload his rifle as soon as he fired; but what was one bullet among so many?

He did not know what to do, but was preparing to stand his ground and make the best fight

he could, when he was greeted by a shrill voice near at hand.

"Take to the water, mister! Take to the water!"

The next instant a lad came running to him—a dwarfish and misshapen lad, but active and fleet of foot.

When to this description it is added that he carried a fine repeating-rifle, the youth will be recognized as Abner Sanders, who was on his way home from Staley's with his splendid present.

"Foller me, mister, and be quick!" he cried, as he reached the detective.

Then he dashed into the lake.

It at once occurred to the detective that the new arrival had taken the wisest course, as no animal of the cat tribe can be induced to enter the water.

So he followed the lad instantly, and both waded into the lake until the water was up to their waists.

Then they turned and faced their adversaries.

The wildcats had come forward swiftly, running and leaping; but they halted when they reached the shore of the lake, snarling and lashing their tails, apparently anxious to get at their natural enemies and make an end of them.

"That was good advice you gave me, young fellow," said the detective; "but it seems to me that we are freed here. How are we going to get rid of those beasts?"

"Kill 'em," answered the lad.

"That is easy to say; but I don't believe I can load here, and that leaves me only one shot."

"I've got plenty shots. Come, then. Let's clean 'em out."

It was the first chance Abner had had to use his repeating-rifle, though he had practiced working it, and had once fired at a mark as he came through the woods.

As the lad was an excellent shot, the beautiful weapon got in its work in fine style, and Terrapin Dick, after he had fired his one shot, figuratively took a back seat, and watched his companion admiringly.

Again and again Judge Meacham's gift sent forth its stream of fire and its dose of lead, and one member after another of the wildcat caucus tumbled over and clawed the air.

The survivors, frantic with rage, were more than once on the point of jumping into the lake to get at their antagonists; but a near approach to the water disgusted them with that idea.

In the mean time their numbers were diminished until but two were left.

One of those, slightly wounded, limped away as fast as he could, and the other, though unhurt, turned tail and followed his mate.

The field was then clear, except for the beasts that were wounded but not yet dead, and Dick Risden and Abner Sanders went ashore and soon put an end to their struggles and pain.

CHAPTER XIV.

INTO THE FIRE.

WHEN the wildcats had been disposed of, Terrapin Dick took a calm and close survey of the lad who had come to his rescue.

Abner, who was evidently proud of his performance, and especially proud of his fine rifle, did not object to this inspection.

"I tell you what it is, young chap," said the detective. "It is my opinion that you are a brick, a trump, a whole team, the right person in the right place. I would have been in a bad scrape if you had not hopped in to get me out of it. There is everything in knowing what to do and how to do it."

"I thought everybody knew that wildcats wouldn't go into the water," remarked Abner.

"But there are a great many people who don't know it, and it is lucky for them that they don't need to know it. I knew it, but couldn't think of it just when I ought to."

"Well, mister, we slaughtered 'em, and I guess I'll take the scalps o' them critters now."

"Suppose you wait a bit. I was just going to have something to eat when those howlers interrupted me. I guess we had better get some of the water out of our clothes, and then I will divide my lunch with you if you will have it."

This suited Abner very well, and the two were soon amicably and hungrily discussing the provisions that Risden had brought in his haversack.

The detective's curiosity concerning his companion was as lively as his appetite, and he endeavored to satisfy it.

"You are a very bright youngster," said he. "Where did you come from?"

"The river," briefly replied Abner.

"The river, hey? Of course it don't make any difference what river it was. Rivers and lakes are so scarce about here. Where are you going to?"

"The woods."

"Well, my young friend, your replies are very brief and very unsatisfactory. I suppose you must have come from everywhere in general, and are going nowhere in particular. But it was lucky for me that you happened along when you did. Who are you, anyhow?"

"I'm the son of the Devil. Have you seen my daddy anywhere about here?"

"I have not, and I can't say that I care to find him. I think I must have met some of his imps here a bit ago. I would like to know whether, in your opinion, this is what may be called a good day for wildcats?"

"I've seen wuss," answered the lad.

"Still your information is not very explicit. That is a fine rifle of yours. Where did you get it?"

"My uncle gave it to me."

"The Devil's brother, hey?"

"No—he's more like an angel."

"If angels have taken to carrying rifles to give away, it is a new fashion they've got. Tell me, my young friend, do you happen to know a family anywhere about here by the name of Sanders?"

Abner squinted into the muzzle of his rifle, and an unusually old look came into his wizened face.

"Seems to me that I used to know some folks named Jones," he answered. "Won't that do?"

"Scarcely. I perceive that you are not boiling over with information and anxious to get rid of it. Are you not a bit inquisitive? Why don't you ask me where I came from, and who I am?"

"Because I know."

"You do, do you?"

"Yes, and there is only one question I want to ask you, mister."

"What is that?"

"I want to know what's the use o' pumps, up here in the woods, where water is plenty."

"I give it up. You have decidedly the advantage of me, youngster, and that is what few people get. I owe you a good turn, and I won't worry you any more. So each of us will pick up his feet and go his own way."

"I guess it's time to be goin'."

But it was fated that the intention thus expressed should not be at once carried into effect.

Dick Risden and Abner Sanders were seated on the ground, facing the lake, and were so intently occupied, one in working his pump, and the other in avoiding the suction, that they took no notice of what was going on behind them.

In fact, the demonstrations in their rear were so very quiet that they could not be expected to attract attention.

Their foes this time were not wildcats, but human wolves.

Four rough-looking men, wearing the unmistakable appearance and manner of French Canadians, had been stealthily advancing upon them from the depths of the forest.

Doubtless attracted by the firing, they had come to see what was going on, and had discovered what seemed to be an easy prey and probable booty in at least one of the two who were seated by the shore of the lake.

After a brief consultation they noiselessly approached their intended victims, and were but a little distance from them when Risden and Abner concluded to separate and go their several ways.

At a signal from their leader, and just as the Americans were about to rise, the vagabond Kanucks pounced upon them.

Terrapin Dick was seized before he could get upon his feet, and in spite of his struggles was held until he was securely bound.

Abner Sanders was more agile and more fortunate.

Slipping out from under the hands that were about to grasp him, he at once began to make a lively use of his legs, not forgetting to carry with him in his flight his beloved rifle.

Dwarfish and deformed as he was, he proved himself to be a remarkable runner, and Dick Risden stared in astonishment at the speed of the lad as he disappeared in the forest.

The Kanucks were equally astonished, but did not fail to start in pursuit of him.

The two who followed him were capital runners, wiry, active, and not easily winded; but they soon discovered that they were no match for the fugitive, who flitted away from them like a bird.

They made no attempt to stop him with a bullet, as they were only thievishly inclined—not murderously—and he was small game, anyhow.

Terrapin Dick's captors proceeded to search him, and they found, perhaps, a richer booty than they had expected.

He had considerable money upon his person, and in his vest-pocket was a gold watch, and in the breast pocket of his coat a flask of liquor, besides his rifle, which was a very good weapon of its class.

These articles were quickly confiscated, and passed into the possession of the leader of the party.

The flask was handed around among them, and they held a consultation in a dialect which the detective did not understand.

He could speak French, but was only able to catch now and then a word of their *patois*, from which he could gather no meaning.

Finally they made him rise, and marched him away into the woods, his hands bound behind his back, and his captors guarding him closely.

They walked him quite a distance—five or six miles, as near as he could judge—until they came to a broken and rugged region, probably the foothills of a mountain.

Here they led him up into a glen, a lovely and romantic spot, through which flowed a small stream that issued from a spring at the head of the ravine.

This was evidently their camping-place, and had been used as such for some time.

Picked bones were plentifully scattered about, and a few rude cooking utensils were visible; but there were no other camp comforts except some coarse blankets.

Risden was given a comfortable seat at the foot of a tree, and the Kanucks hastened to satisfy their hunger.

They were scarce of bread, but had plenty of meat from the game that abounded in the forest, and that seemed to be sufficient for them, as they ate it half-cooked and most voraciously.

The detective was offered some of their food, but he tasted it sparingly, as he had eaten his lunch, and their style of cooking disgusted him.

They made such a swift and steady business of eating, that very few words passed between them until they had gorged themselves.

Then they lighted their pipes, and liquor, of which they seemed to have an abundant supply, circulated freely among them.

As they smoked and drank they jabbered freely enough, and Risden listened intently to all that was said, bringing the full force of his acute intellect to bear upon the problem of endeavoring to extract some information from their talk.

In this he was reasonably successful.

It was certain that the talk was about him, their glances and gestures denoting this, as well as the words that he caught.

He also understood enough of their jabber to form the opinion that they supposed him to be a wealthy amateur hunter from the lower country, and that they had a pretty definite idea of holding him for a ransom.

This they might easily do, as far as keeping him was concerned, it being highly improbable that anybody would find him in those forests, except by accidentally stumbling upon them.

That was a game, however, at which he could play as well as they.

As long as his life was safe his chances for escape were good.

They could not keep him always tied up, and he would surely not again be taken by any sort of surprise.

CHAPTER XV.

TERRAPIN DICK IN CAPTIVITY.

THE vagabond Kanucks drank pretty heavily while they were smoking, and their potations, combined with the very hearty meal they had eaten, made them drowsy.

That the liquor had muddled their brains was evident to the detective, as only one of them had sense enough to stagger to him and see that he was secure before they threw themselves down on the ground to sleep, and only two of them selected positions in the shade.

This seemed to offer him an opportunity, and he endeavored to avail himself of it.

But the result of his attempt was disheartening.

The thong with which his hands were tied behind his back was of raw deerskin, and his efforts to pull loose only drew the knot tighter, and it was impossible to cut his bonds by any means within his power.

Having exhausted himself with these endeavors, he abandoned them, and followed the example of his comrades by gradually dropping into sleep.

But he was a light sleeper, and after awhile he was awakened by a weight upon his legs.

It was not a heavy weight; but there was something about it—something in the feel of it—that struck his waking senses as singular and even fearful.

Opening his eyes, he saw a sight that struck a chill to his heart, and sent a shudder all through his frame.

Upon his stretched-out legs, just above the knees, had crawled an enormous rattlesnake.

Its head had reached his right leg, and its tail, with the unmistakable rattle, trailed on the ground by the side of his left leg.

It was surely a situation that was calculated to try the strongest nerve.

As Risden opened his eyes the hideous serpent, with its mouth open and its forked tongue out, was looking him direct in the face, and he quickly closed them again.

He had reason to believe that a rattlesnake would not strike except from its coil; but there could be no doubt that little would be needed to induce it to throw itself into a coil and sink its deadly fangs into his flesh.

His only chance was to keep perfectly quiet, in the hope that the reptile would soon leave him, and he required all his nerve to refrain from making the least movement.

But the sun happened to be shining then upon his legs below and above the knees, and

his snakeship appeared to think that he had discovered a good place to bask, as he stretched himself out, and showed no disposition to move in any direction.

Terrapin Dick shuddered again as he looked from under his eyelids and perceived the sluggish condition of the reptile.

Would it never go away?

If any of the sleeping Kanucks should awake and make a noise, the serpent might be aroused to anger and do deadly harm.

Why had it not selected for its familiarities one of those vagabonds instead of him?

The world could better bear the loss of any one of them than of so useful a man as Dick Risden.

It was distressing and humiliating to think that he should have safely passed through so many and such various perils, to become the helpless prey of a sneaking serpent away up there in the woods.

Then his limbs and his body began to feel strained and rigid, and he felt an almost irresistible desire to change his position.

He was by no means a nervous man by nature; but at that time every nerve and fiber seemed to tingle, and it was with the utmost difficulty that he could restrain himself from raising his legs or doing some other desperate act.

When one of the sleepers stretched his arms and yawned, as if about to awake and arise, the detective closed his eyes, in the belief that the crisis had come.

But the man settled back to sleep, and relief arrived just when the situation had become unendurable.

A cloud came over the face of the sun, and the snake, missing the warmth it had found on the man's legs, slid off upon the ground, and glided away among the rocks.

Dick Risden's thankfulness as the venomous reptile vanished from his sight was beyond expression.

He had never been afraid of death; but such a death would be too horrible.

He wished that he could look in a mirror just then, as it seemed to him that his hair must have turned gray in that fearful half-hour or less.

As solitude was painful to him then, and bad company was better than none, he shouted until he aroused some of the sleepers, and soon all were awake and stirring.

He related to them the episode of the snake, and they stared at him and at the reptile's track that was plainly visible in the dust.

"If you keep me tied up in this way," said he, "I am liable to be killed by such a snake as that without being able to help myself."

"You want to go 'way?" inquired the leader.

"Of course I do. I don't know what you want to keep me here for, anyhow."

"Den you send writin' to rich friends down-country. Tell um send you money up here—t'ousand dollar. Den you go 'way."

Evidently a thousand dollars was a vast amount of wealth in the eyes of those vagabonds.

"Very well," replied the detective. "I am quite willing to do that. But how shall I write the letter?"

This was a stumper, as no paper or writing-utensils had been found on his person, and there was nothing of the kind in the possession of the Kanucks.

"We get um," said the leader, after a little reflection. "Den you write letter. We take it to Staley's."

The day was then near its close, and the Kanucks proceeded to cook some more of the wild meat, with which they were well supplied, and to gorge themselves again until they could hold no more.

Terrapin Dick persuaded them to broil him some venison to suit his taste, and he ate heartily of it, though he had neither bread nor salt.

In view of the possibility that all his strength might be needed for the purpose of effecting an escape, he could not afford to neglect the needs of his body.

When they had finished their meal, his captors again lighted their pipes and passed around their liquor.

While they were thus engaged they sat in a circle, in the center of which they placed Risden's money and watch and rifle, and, as they smoked and drank, they jabbered about the division of the plunder.

As the detective sat and watched them, cherishing hard feelings against them, and wishing that he had a sufficient force at his back to punish them for their villainous conduct, he also thought of the lad who had so deftly escaped from their clutches.

He wondered what had become of that youngster, and was obliged to confess to entertaining a suspicion of him which at the same time he felt to be unwarranted.

The boy had got away very easily, and was it not possible that he had been a decoy?

Might he not be a member of the thieving band, who had been sent on to gain his confidence and betray him into their hands?

Might not his conduct in the affair of the

wildcats have been merely a part of that rascally scheme?

The detective was naturally suspicious—it was his business to be suspicious—and he had his doubts.

He hated to have such thoughts about the young fellow who had come to his help; but, if he did not belong to the band of thieves, who and what was he?

The shades of night were falling, and the Kanucks had not yet agreed upon the division of the spoil, when they and Terrapin Dick were startled by a hideous yell close at hand.

CHAPTER XVI.

A BLOODLESS VICTORY.

THE lad concerning whom Dick Risden entertained such dark suspicions did not deserve them in the least, and would have been mortified as well as surprised to know that he had been suspected.

As soon as he had eluded and distanced the men who captured Risden, he stopped running, turned back, and began to pursue his pursuers.

He stealthily returned to the shore of the lake, and watched them until they led their captive away into the woods.

Then he followed them like a shadow, keeping them in sight, but not suffering himself to be seen by them.

When they entered the glen where they had their camp he went in after them far enough to assure himself that they intended to remain there, and then backed out and laid his plans for astonishing them.

He had fully determined that he would not leave Risden in their hands; yet the rescue of the detective was surely a difficult feat for a dwarfish boy to accomplish single-handed.

He picked his way around among the hills, and climbed a ridge at the rear of the glen, from which position he could plainly see all that went on in the camp of the Kanucks.

There he waited and bided his time.

When the vagabonds went to sleep after their dinner there seemed to be an opportunity for him; but he did not hasten to avail himself of it, as daylight was unfavorable to the plan he had formed.

But the chance was such a tempting one that he finally decided to descend into the glen, and had started in that direction when Terrapin Dick began to shout and awake his captors.

Then Abner stopped where he was, concealed himself behind a rock, and once more waited and bided his time.

Darkness was what he was waiting for, or dusk, at least, and his time came when the glen was in shadow, and the thieves were gathered about their plunder, smoking and drinking.

Carefully he climbed down the ridge—so carefully that he did not break a twig.

Reaching the bottom of the glen, he stole forward among the scanty trees, and waited a while until the darkness grew thicker.

It was a daring and desperate plan that he had formed, and it was absolutely necessary that he should succeed, as there would be no escape for him in case of failure.

When the time for action had arrived he uttered the hideous yell that startled the detective and his captors, and followed it up by rapidly firing his repeating-rifle in the air.

At the same time he shouted at the top of his shrill voice to an imaginary array of backers:

"Here they are, boys! Come on, now! Pitch into 'em! Give 'em Jesse! Kill the lousy scamps! Hurry up there!"

The rapid firing that accompanied these orders could not fail to give the Kanucks the idea that they were attacked by a strong body of armed men, and the effect was instantaneous.

They jumped up and ran for their lives, snatching their weapons as they rose, but making no effort to use them in their headlong flight.

The surprise was so great, and their stampede was so sudden, that the booty they had taken from Risden was left lying there on the ground.

Abner Sanders hurried them on by continuing his shouts to his imaginary allies, and firing his rifle again and again.

As they disappeared at the lower end of the ravine he reached the place where Terrapin Dick was seated, and quickly cut the thong with which his hands were bound.

The detective jumped up and followed him, recovering his plunder, including his rifle, from the place where it had been left by the frightened thieves.

Then he joined his voice to that of Abner, and both of them ran out of the ravine after the Kanucks, yelling and firing as they went.

When they were fairly out of the glen, however, they quickly changed their tactics, and became quiet enough.

Silently they stole away to the right, and tramped and stumbled among the rocks and ravines, in a direction which their adversaries would not have been likely to take, until they considered themselves safe from interception or pursuit, when they sat down to rest.

It was then quite dark; but the moon was rising, and its glimmer could already be seen through the trees.

"This is the second time that you have got

me out of trouble, young chap," remarked Terrapin Dick. "I owed you a good turn a while ago, and now I owe you another. I don't know how I am going to get out of your debt, and I would like to do something for you."

"You don't owe me nothin'," replied Abner. "It was the best kind of fun for me, and the way those fellers scattered suited me to a dot."

"It would have been no sort of fun to me, though, if you had not come to my help. You not only got me out of trouble, but saved my money and my watch and my rifle. By rights the money belongs to you now, as much as to me, and I wish you would let me give you some of it, as you have fairly earned it."

After some persuasion Abner consented to accept ten dollars, which was a large amount of wealth in his eyes.

"How are you going to find your way back to your camp, or wherever you belong?" he inquired.

"I don't know, unless I can induce you to help me out of this scrape, too. I have not the faintest idea what course I shall take to reach my camp."

"Kinder lost, hey?"

"Decidedly lost. But, if I could find my way to the lake where we met the wildcats, I am quite sure that I could get on from there."

"All right, Cap. I'll take you there."

The lad, whose knowledge of the ways of the woods seemed to be instinctive, struck a bee-line through the forest, and guided Ridsen to the exact spot where they had the encounter with the wildcats.

"Do you think you can guide yourself the rest of the way?" he asked.

"Yes. The moon is up, and I will have no more trouble."

"Well, Mr. Ridsen, you may go your way now, and I will go mine."

The detective looked at the lad curiously.

"So you do know me," said he. "I wish that I knew who you were. But you are too deep for me, and I need not try to find out anything about you that you don't choose to tell me."

"That's so," answered Abner. "Good-night."

The two strange companions separated, and each went his own way.

As Abner boasted of being able to find his way home through the forest on the darkest night, he would naturally be able to find it easily enough when the moon was shining brightly, and he struck out with confidence, walking rapidly, in the hope of reaching his people before they should become uneasy about him.

The course he took led him near the ravine from which he had scared the Kanucks, and there he was destined to meet with another adventure.

When Terrapin Dick was held as a prisoner by those vagabonds, he had noticed that no one of them seemed to have been recently wounded.

Therefore he concluded that the man who had been shot in the arm by Ben Lawson was not among them, and that led him to the further conclusion that his captors were only part of the band that were prowling about that vicinity, or that there was another band of similar scoundrels.

Both suppositions were partly correct.

There had been one band, which was temporarily divided into two parts, each section keeping itself advised of the location and doings of the other.

When Abner Sanders had routed the party in the glen they did not have to go far to find their friends.

Reinforced by them they returned to the ravine for the purpose of recapturing their camp and taking vengeance on their assailants, and arrived in that vicinity just as Abner was passing.

Catching sight of him, they set up a yell, and immediately started to pursue him.

The lad had been tramping a great deal during the day; but he started off at a gait that kept him well ahead of his pursuers, and he took advantage of the intricacies of the forest and the broken ground, with which he was well acquainted, to foil them and throw them off the track.

But they quickly picked up the trail, and followed it like hounds on the track of a deer.

It was a grief to him just then that his bloodless victory in the ravine had deprived him of all his ammunition except one cartridge, which was in his rifle.

He was not at all inclined to kill any of the Kanucks, however much they might deserve killing; but he could not help wishing that he was better supplied with food for his rifle, so that he might teach them to keep their distance if they should come too close.

Not being so supplied, he could only trust to his legs for his liberty, and he had good reason to fear that they would not last him much longer, while there seemed to be no break-down to the tireless lope of his enemies.

Therefore he was glad enough when he came in sight of the gap that led to his home.

He could not hope to avoid his pursuers, or to prevent them from following him; but he would find help there, and he believed that his father and his brother Dave and his cousin Nick, with himself, would be a match for all the Kanucks.

So he dashed in at the entrance of the basin, and only stopped there long enough to unchain Boney and give him an order which the bear seemed to understand.

Then he ran on, shouting at the top of his voice as he approached the house,

"Dad! Dave! Hello! Hello-o-o! The Kanucks are arter me, and they are comin' in here!"

CHAPTER XVII.

JULIUS MULDROW'S FIRE HUNT.

THE detective made his way without any further difficulty from the lake to the camp, where he found Hemlock Hank worrying about his absence, and more than half-inclined to go in search of him.

Julius Muldrow had also been somewhat exercised in his mind concerning the same subject; but he greeted Ridsen with a sneer, and insolently asked him if he had been losing himself in the woods.

"Worse than that," answered Terrapin Dick. "I have been in not only one bad scrape, but two of them, and you would not have seen me here to-night, unless I had received unexpected assistance. I will tell you all about it after a while; but just now I am too hungry to talk."

Hemlock Hank started the smudge into a fire, and helped his friend cook some food, which Ridsen ate with a relish.

"Now I will have a square smoke," he said, "and will tell you a queer story."

It was indeed a queer story which the detective told with great particularity, omitting no detail, and especially repeating with great exactness every word of the conversation between himself and the lad who had come to his rescue.

"Those Kanucks," said he, "are a set of scoundrels that we will have to look out for as long as we stay about here. They are the slyest and sneakingest thieves I ever came across."

"We must ketch a couple of 'em," observed Hemlock Hank, "and tie 'em up, and give 'em a good larrupin as a lesson to the others."

"That will help them some, if we can get hold of them. But the queerest part of the whole business was that boy. He knew me, and called me by name; but I could no more get any information from him than I could squeeze blood from a turnip."

"Mebbe I can give you a little, Dick. You say that he was dwarfish, wizen-faced, sorter humpbacked, and can run like a deer. There's a boy like that in that Sanders family. I've never seen him, but have heard tell of him, and guess that this must be the same chap."

"Quite likely. If they are all as smart as he is, they will worry us some before we are through with them."

"I had supposed," said Julius Muldrow, with his usual sneer, "that you were smart enough to keep out of such scrapes. I don't pretend to know as much about the woods as you do; but I have got into no difficulty yet."

"Not even with a bear?" suggested Ridsen.

"Confound the bear! I would have killed the beast if I could have got at my rifle."

"That was what was the matter with me. They took me unawares, as the bear came up on you."

"But you missed a fine chance, Ridsen. That boy was a suspicious character—a very suspicious character. If I had been in your place, I would have tied him, and brought him into the camp, and made him tell who he was and where he belonged."

"Would you? After he had pulled you out of two bad holes? I have not got to be quite so mean as that—not yet."

The next day it was decided to remove the quarters of the party to a lake that was distant about a mile from their present camp—the same lake, in fact, on the shore of which Terrapin Dick had twice come to grief.

This change involved a heavy portage, it being necessary to carry the skiff and all their property through the woods to the new location.

The detective and the guide did the heaviest part of the work, carrying the skiff on their shoulders, and reaching the point for which they had aimed in good time, in spite of numerous stoppages for rest.

Julius Muldrow grumbled at the light load that was allotted to him, and was always ready to stop to rest.

Leaving him in charge of the new camp, the others made two trips for the rest of their property, and had everything in place before the middle of the afternoon.

When they had finished their late dinner, Julius Muldrow was seized by a new idea, upon which, as upon all his ideas, he insisted strongly.

"There must be deer about this lake," said he. "It is a fine place for deer, and a splendid chance for night-hunting. If I had somebody to manage the boat for me, I would go out to-night and bring in some big game."

Good-natured Hemlock Hank offered to take his employer out on the lake.

He was willing to do the young man a favor for the sake of "keeping peace in the family," and he wanted to see what Julius was really

capable of as a hunter. Besides, they needed meat.

"I think I can put up a deer for you without any trouble," said he. "But we will have to start as soon as night falls, so as to do what we can before the moon rises."

Julius Muldrow prepared himself for the still hunt by putting his rifle in order, to which procedure he devoted considerable time, with no small show of science.

Hemlock Hank made the skiff ready, and at nightfall he set out with his amateur hunter, Terrapin Dick watching them with interest from the shore.

A lighted torch was set in the bow of the boat, behind which Muldrow was stationed, and the guide seated himself in the stern, wielding a paddle instead of the oars, as he could thus look out ahead and at the same time propel the skiff quietly.

Silently the boat moved through the dark and tranquil water, slowly making the circuit of the lake, and keeping near the shore to watch for the expected game.

They had scarcely got out of sight of the camp-fire when they came upon a noble buck that had walked into the lake under the shade of the tall trees, where it was cooling its legs and drinking at leisure.

Hemlock Hank, by a dextrous stroke of his paddle, sent the skiff ahead, and then stopped it in front of the game.

The deer, as if fascinated by the light, stood motionless, and stared right ahead at the strange phenomenon of fire.

There could not be a fairer chance for a shot, and the guide waited impatiently for his sportsman to get his work in.

But the young man fiddled and fooled with his rifle, as if he did not know what to do with it, and was too nervous to take aim if he could have made up his mind to fire.

It was a clear case of buck fever.

"Why don't you shoot?" demanded the disgusted guide.

"I was just going to when you spoke. Had I better fire at his eye?"

"I wish you would fire at something, and be quick about it. There! he's off!"

Sure enough, the buck took the alarm at that moment, turned quickly, and bounded off into the forest.

Muldrow fired at him at last; but the shot was wasted, and the splendid creature escaped unharmed.

"That's too bad!" exclaimed Hemlock Hank, who succeeded in suppressing his indignation, but could not help betraying his disgust.

"It's too darned bad! A fairer chance for a shot I never saw. Why didn't you shoot that buck?"

"I don't know," sheepishly answered Julius. "A queer feeling came over me, and took all the nerve out of me."

"Buck fever, I guess. Greenies allus gits it. But you might have shot him when you did fire."

"I thought I might, too; but I didn't. Perhaps there was no bullet in my rifle."

"Thunderation! You don't mean to say that after all the fuss you made over that gun you could have forgot to put a bullet in it? You had better be careful how you load now, as we are likely to find another deer afore we git back to camp."

Julius loaded his rifle carefully, and Hemlock Hank again paddled slowly onward; but it was not until they had nearly circumnavigated the lake that they found some more game.

Then the find was worth looking at.

A noble buck was standing in the water near the shore, and with him were a doe and a fawn.

Again the guide made the skiff shoot silently ahead, and halted it where his sportsman could have a sure and easy shot.

The three beautiful creatures stood and stared steadily at the light, as if not knowing what to make of it, and a fairer chance to kill the buck could not be offered.

Julius Muldrow, apparently no longer afflicted with buck fever, raised his rifle and fired.

The fawn tumbled over in the water; but the buck and the doe tossed their heads and ran away.

Hemlock Hank dropped the paddle across his lap, and stared blankly at the young man.

He was utterly unable to do justice to the subject.

"Why don't you pull in and get my game?" demanded Julius, as the skiff slowly drifted away.

"What game?" inquired the guide.

"The deer I killed."

"Do you call that a deer—that baby? So you missed that splendid buck, and shot that poor little fawn!"

"I did not miss!" angrily replied Julius. "I fired at the fawn."

"You did?"

"Yes; I wanted it."

"Heavens above us! This is too much. If you had said that you missed the big one, and hit the little one by accident, I might have forgiven you. But to think that you did it a-purpose! Oh, Moses in the bullrushes!"

"Are you not going to get my game and

carry it to the camp?" demanded the young man.

"Not I," sternly answered the guide, as he whirled the skiff around and headed it away from the spot.

"You will be sorry for this some time, Ward!"

"Don't believe I will. Not if I know myself, and I guess I do. I'd starve for meat afore I'd take that baby into camp. It's bad enough to take in the man that shot it. No fawn-hunter goes out with me no more—never—not at all!"

Julius Muldrow was sulky enough on his way back to the camp, and his sulkiness continued after he had landed.

Hemlock Hank said nothing about his companion's exploits in his presence, merely remarking that they had killed nothing, and Julius was equally reticent.

"But I heard two shots," urged Ridsen.

"Yes—they were fired in the air," answered Hank.

When he was alone with his friend he told him the story of the fire-hunt, and freely expressed his deep disgust at the exhibition Muldrow had made of himself.

"I'm more out o' patience with that chap than ever," said he. "There's no use tryin' to make anythin' of him. If I do all I can to please him, and try to git on the right side of him, the cuss is sart'in to break out with some new bit of meanness that riles my very gizzard."

"Well, Hank, we must try to finish up the business that brought us here, and get out of the scrape."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SCOUT AND A FIND.

IN pursuance of his expressed desire to finish the business that had brought them up into the pine woods, Terrapin Dick that night proposed to his friend that they should make a long scout the next day to endeavor to find traces of the Sanders family, who were believed to be not far from their camp as it was then located.

Julius Muldrow insisted upon accompanying them.

His experience with a bear on the occasion of the previous absence of both of them from the camp had been sufficient to disgust him with the idea of being left alone.

As there was no help for it, they were obliged to count him as one of the scouting-party.

They had their breakfast as soon as the dawn gave them light enough to see, after which they cached in a hole in the ground all their portable property except the skiff, which they concealed in a clump of bushes.

They took nothing with them but their arms and ammunition and a supply of cooked provisions for each.

"You'll have to be the guide here, Dick," said Hemlock Hank as they left the lake. "You ought to be able to lead us to the hole the Kanucks took you to, and that's the place we want to strike first."

"You must not bet too heavy on me there," replied the detective. "I was so worried and mad just then that I confess that I didn't have a very clear idea of courses and distances. But I will make the best guess at it that I can."

As it turned out, he made a very good guess, though it must be admitted that he was largely assisted by Hemlock Hank, who struck the trail which the Kanucks had made when they carried off his friend, and had no difficulty in following it.

They easily found the ravine in which had been the den of the vagabonds, and entered it cautiously, with their weapons ready for action, as it was probable that they might get into trouble there.

The detective and the guide noticed, but without commenting upon the fact, that Julius Muldrow lagged behind at this juncture, freely giving up to them the post of danger.

But there was no danger, as it happened.

The glen was empty, and the camp was deserted.

In the opinion of Terrapin Dick it had not been occupied since he was a prisoner there.

What had become of the Kanucks?

This was not a question of any importance to the Americans; but as they continued their scout, they soon discovered signs of the vagabonds.

At a little distance from the mouth of the ravine they found a trail, and followed it out of curiosity, as they might as well take that direction as any other.

It led them among hills and ravines, and finally up the side of a mountain, where it became merged in a plain and well-trodden path.

"This begins to look like business," remarked Hemlock Hank. "We're bound to git somewhere afore long, and it's somethin' more'n a Kanuck camp that we're apt to find at the end o' this trail, too."

The detective was of the same opinion, and Hank took the lead, moving as cautiously as if upon the track of an enemy whom he might meet at any moment.

Again Julius Muldrow lagged behind, keeping at a respectful distance from his comrades.

They had got well up into the mountain when Hemlock Hank suddenly halted, and motioned for silence.

"I heard voices ahead," he said. "Listen!"

The detective listened, and also heard the voices.

Soon they heard something more than voices, a few rifle-shots breaking the silence of the mountain.

"It must be the Kanucks," said the guide, "and they've got into some sort of a fight, I guess. I wouldn't ha' thought they had the grit to do it. We must find out what they're up to."

Hank crept forward in the path, followed closely by his friend Ridsen, and more distantly by Julius Muldrow, until he came in sight of a part of the mountain that was too steep to be ascended.

It might have been supposed to bar further progress in that direction, had not a gap been visible that must lead to somewhere or something.

As the guide and his friend crouched in concealment and "sized up" the situation as well as they could at the time, a shot was fired from the gap, and was quickly followed by one from behind a tree at the outside.

It was clear that the Kanucks, or whoever might be there, were besieging some persons at the gap or inside of it.

"I can't make this out," whispered Hemlock Hank. "If those are the Kanucks that we've been follerin', they must ha' got on the scent o' big plunder, as it is sart'in that the sneaks wouldn't fight fur nothin'."

"It is our business to know what is going on here," replied Ridsen. "We must find out what their game is, and perhaps we may have to take a hand in it."

"That's so, Dick, and if there's anybody with us who would rather not git into trouble, that somebody had better step out now and take the back track to the camp."

This hint was intended for Julius Muldrow; but he gave no heed to it, doubtless considering himself in any event better off with his friends than away from them.

Hemlock Hank led the way up among the rocks and bushes and stunted trees to a position at the right of the gap and somewhat above that which was supposed to be occupied by the Kanucks.

From this position, while they could easily conceal themselves, they were able to see all that went on below them and at the gap.

Nothing was done for a while.

Both the belligerents kept quiet, and it was impossible even to guess at the intentions of either party.

Finally a new plan of campaign began to take shape.

The Kanucks—for there could no longer be any doubt as to who the assailants were—numbering seven or eight men, could be seen advancing from tree to tree in the hollow, drawing closer together, and gradually approaching the gap as they kept themselves well sheltered.

It was to be supposed that their object was to get as near as possible to the gap in a body, and then make a rush and carry the position of their unknown enemies.

This design was well carried out, and the advance of the vagabonds, though slow, was sure and apparently safe.

Not a shot was fired from the gap, and no sign of life was visible there.

It looked as if the Kanucks were about to make a success of their bold but carefully considered enterprise.

"No use talkin', Dick," remarked Hemlock Hank. "We'll have to take a hand in this game, as you said. I must say, too, for my part, that I'm glad of the chance. How does it strike you, old man?"

"It suits me to a fraction, as I owe those scamps a grudge. Shall we swoop down into the hollow and tackle them, or pick off a few of them from here?"

"We had better pounce on 'em and be quick about it. Look! they are all ready to rush in. There they go in a bunch. Come on, Dick!"

The vagabonds, in fact, were already at the gap, and were crowding into it, when something happened.

Before Hemlock Hank and his comrade could begin to descend the hill, there was a rushing, roaring noise at the gap, like the sound of distant thunder, and the Kanucks hastened to make the best possible use of their legs in running away from there.

"By the big steel spikes!" exclaimed the guide. "What the tarnation is that?"

CHAPTER XIX.

WARFARE AND WATER.

THE shouts of Abner Sanders when he ran into the basin beyond the gap roused his father and his brother at once, and they came tumbling out of the house, half-dressed, Nick a good third, and all with their weapons ready for any emergency.

"What is the matter, Abner?" demanded his father.

"Kanucks. They follered me here, and are comin' in. Say, dad, Judge Meacham gimme his rifle. Did you find any cartridges at the lake?"

"Lots of 'em. Tin box full. Ask mammy."

Ike Sanders could not stop to talk, but hurried toward the gap, shouting to Dave and Nick, both of whom were close behind him.

It was not the first time he had been raided by prowling thieves who had discovered his secluded retreat, and he wanted to give this batch a lesson that would cause them to keep away from him.

To this wish was of course added the something more than instinct that prompts a man to defend his family and his home.

"Aunt Sereeny," as Nick Sanders styled the mother of the family, was awake as soon as any of them, and was ready for action quite as quick as any of them.

In fact, a little quicker; as she had only to jump into a flannel skirt and hook it, and she was dressed.

She had a hunting rifle of her own, too, and knew how to manage the weapon, and was always ready and willing to use it.

But just then she was obliged to answer the hurried demand of Abner for "them cartridges."

The lad stuffed a number of them into his pockets, and hurried off after his father.

Ike Sanders, closely followed by Dave and Nick, had already reached the gap, just in time to check the advance of the Kanucks and prevent them from entering and taking possession of the basin.

Abner quickly joined them, and his mother hastened down with her rifle, prepared to do a man's part in the work of defending her home and family.

For a few minutes there was a brief interchange of shots, the effect of which was to drive the assailants out of the gap and send them to seek cover.

It was not deemed advisable to take the risk of following them out, especially at night, as the Sanders family thought they would be doing well enough to keep them from entering the basin.

Therefore it was decided that they should confine their efforts for the present to the duty of guarding the gap.

The arrangement was that Ike Sanders and Dave should keep watch, that the mother should return to the house, and that Nick and Abner should sleep there on the ground, with their rifles at their sides.

There was not much sleeping done, however.

Abner was highly excited over his recent adventures, which he was anxious to relate, and his cousin Nick soon became deeply interested in the story.

The lad began with his journey to Staley's as guide to Judge Meacham, and took great pride in showing the valuable rifle which the judge had forced on him as a gift.

Then he told of his adventure on the shore of a lake with a strange man, in which several wildcats were mixed up.

Next came an account of the capture of the stranger by the Kanucks, and then he told how he had raided the camp of the vagabonds, frightened them away, and rescued their captive.

The conclusion of his story was his pursuit by the Kanucks until he gained a refuge inside the gap.

"And now, dad," said the hero of that series of adventures, "who do you guess that stranger was?"

"I ain't good at guessin', Abner. Supposin' you tell us, if you know."

"I do know. I knew him as soon as I sot eyes onto him, and it worried him some to find out that I knew him while he didn't know me. He pumped me for all he was wuth, but never got a drop out o' me."

"But who was he, boy?"

"His name is Ridsen, and he is a detective from Boston, but don't seem to have much of the city chap about him. He is the same man that you and I saw over at the big river a year or so ago. Jim Ledwith p'inted him out to us, and I was skeered of him. Don't you remember that man?"

"I do. Ar, you sure that this is the one?"

"Sart'in."

"I wonder what he is doin' up here now. Mebbe he wants to git hold o' Nick."

"I guess he does, dad. He axed arter some folks named Sanders, and tried to pump me, as I said."

"That's likely to make more trouble for us. But one thing at a time is enough, and we've got these cussed Kanucks to git rid of afore we think of anythin' else."

The Kanucks, however, gave them no more trouble that night, beyond sending an occasional shot into the gap, as if to let it be understood that they were still there.

In the morning it was evident that they were on hand, and that they intended to remain.

A camp-fire outside showed that they were disposed to turn their attack into a siege, with the view of starving out those inside of the gap, if they could not get at them otherwise.

But the Sanders tribe did not intend to be either whipped out or starved out.

They knew a trick worth two of such as their adversaries could play.

"Those skunks must ha' got it into their lousy heads that we've piles o' plunder in here," remarked Ike Sanders. "If they knew how poor we are, mebbe they'd be willin' to leave us alone."

"They'd better," responded Dave, "or they'll git into a scrape afore long that they hain't got no notion of now."

The nature of that scrape became apparent in the course of the day and the following night.

In the middle of the basin, as has been said, there was a large pond, or lake.

The size and depth of this pond were not altogether due to natural causes, as a dam had been built near the gap, by which a reservoir was formed that contained a large quantity of water.

The stream that fed the pond—not at all a large one at that time of the year—overflowed the dam, and ran down through the gap.

When it seemed to be settled that the Kanucks meant to lay siege to the basin and shut up the people who were inside of it, Ike Sanders and his family set at work to build the dam higher, thus retaining the overflow of the stream.

They continued this work through the day, without any annoyance from their enemies, except to the extent of an occasional shot to which it was hardly worth while to reply.

The next morning found the situation unchanged as far as the belligerents were concerned.

There was no fighting to speak of, and no immediate prospect of fighting, though the siege was continued.

But the pond had filled up until the supply of water behind the dam was considerable, and the Sanders tribe began to make preparations for setting it at work.

They removed a portion of the earth from the dam at a point directly opposite to the foot of the pond, disclosing a bulkhead of hewn timber through which a little water escaped.

It was so built and set that it could be used as a gate for the purpose of letting the water off if that should be necessary, being confined by a post that might be easily cut away.

Then it was that the object of Ike Sanders became evident, though no hint of it was conveyed to those on the outside.

He intended to suddenly remove the gate, and flood the gap with the water of the pond, washing away his vagabond adversaries.

"Twill do 'em a power o' good," remarked Dave. "I guess it'll be the first time that water has tetched their skins in a while."

But it was necessary, or at least desirable, to get the enemy into such a position as would allow the flood to exert its full force upon them, and to that end Ike Sanders and Dave then directed their efforts.

As the Kanucks had not been visible for some time, and had only made their presence known by firing an occasional harmless shot, there was no telling whether or not they would be in the line of the flood, and the Sanders tribe wished to locate them, and, if possible, to draw them up into the gap.

With this view Ike and Dave made a reconnaissance down the pass, taking shelter as they went behind boulders and projections of rock, but showing themselves now and then for the purpose of inducing their foes to come out and pursue them.

Nick Sanders, fully instructed in the part he was to perform, stood ready with an ax to cut the post that held the gate.

His "aunt Sreeny," who had been informed of what was to be done, had come down from the house, and had posted herself near him to "boss the job."

Ike Sanders and Dave succeeded well in the task they had undertaken, though they nearly reached the mouth of the pass before they were able to draw their adversaries out.

When the Kanucks caught sight of them and perceived that there were but two of them, they began to fire, and gradually advanced toward the gap.

As they did so, the two scouts retreated so as to offer inducements for pursuit.

As the dropping shots continued, Ike Sanders suddenly uttered a yell of agony.

"I'm shot!" he cried, as he threw up his hands and disappeared from the view of his foes.

This catastrophe, which had been prepared and rehearsed beforehand, produced no effect upon his friends, to whom he quickly sneaked back.

Dave was the next one to yell and throw up his hands, and he also hurried back to the head of the gap.

The Kanucks, encouraged by what appeared to be the fall of two of their opponents, and supposing that they then had an easy victory before them, gathered themselves in a bunch and rushed up into the gap.

"Cut her loose! Let her go!" shouted Ike Sanders, as he ran out at the head of the pass, closely followed by Dave.

The blows of Nick's ax fell swiftly and deftly on the post that was the key to the dam, and in a few minutes he jumped aside as the gate gave way under the pressure from behind.

With a rush and a roar the mass of water leaped forth from its confinement, and started down the pass, a raging, overwhelming torrent.

The Kanucks in the pass heard the ominous noise, but without knowing at first what it meant.

They ran down the rocky way faster than they had run up, in mad efforts to escape; but most of them were too late.

"The game worked well," remarked Ike Sanders. "Guess they've got a good washin' for once in their lives."

The work of the water was soon over.

The mass which had been confined by the dam ran out through the gap, and there was nothing left there but the small stream of water which had fed the pond.

Ike Sanders and his followers picked their way down the lately-flooded passage to see what there was to be seen.

They found none of the Kanucks, either alive or dead.

If the flood had overtaken them, as it must have done, they had been swept away by it, perhaps for some distance down the mountain-side.

But they found a friend of theirs lying behind a rock, which had prevented him from being carried off, and he was stone dead.

It was Abner's pet bear.

He had not been drowned by the flood, but shot by the assailants when they made their first attempt to enter the basin, and there were bullet-holes enough in his body to show how he was slaughtered.

Abner threw himself upon the corpse of his pet, frantic with grief and rage.

He must have known that Boney had fallen a victim to his pursuers, but not until now did he fully realize the fact.

"They've got to pay for this!" he exclaimed, as he stood up with his eyes full of tears, and shook his fist at his invisible foes.

"Hain't they paid for it?" suggested his father. "Don't you guess that the wickedness is purty well washed out o' them?"

"Water won't wash this, though. Nothin' but blood 'll do that!"

"Jimminy, Abner! Ain't you gittin' kinder savage?"

CHAPTER XX.

PINE-WOODS LAW.

TERRAPIN DICK and his companions halted when they heard the noise that had astonished them, and the next moment a flood of water came tearing through the pass and down the hillsides.

With it came the struggling forms of some of the Kanucks, borne onward resistlessly by the rush of water.

They could not know whether a cyclone had struck them, or a waterspout had been turned loose in the hills.

Though they were dashed about among the rocks and trees, and were doubtless considerably bruised, they seemed to be in no danger of death, as the flood spread out after leaving the confines of the gap, and they were enabled to drag their dripping bodies away from its track.

"That beats me!" exclaimed Hemlock Hank, as he and his companions gazed in astonishment at the water and its work.

"It's the queerest wash-out I ever struck. What was it, and who did it, and how was it done?"

"If the Sanders family are in there," remarked Terrapin Dick, "they are a smart crowd, and we will have hard work to get what we want out of them."

Two of the Kanucks must have been lower down in the pass than their comrades were at the time of the water-burst, as they got out before it reached them, and hastened to climb the rocks to escape the flood.

One of them succeeded in attaining a point just below the position occupied by the three Americans, and there he clung, apparently dazed and stupefied, while the water below him receded.

"Guess we'll go a-fishin' here," observed Hemlock Hank, and he reached down and seized the man by the collar.

With the help of Dick Ridsen he lifted the Kanuck, and set him down among them.

The prisoner stared at the strangers in astonishment, and then began to make an outcry, but was speedily persuaded to remain quiet.

"The show seems to be over," said Ridsen, "and I guess we had better get away from here and study up what our next move is to be in this game."

His companions were willing to go with him, especially Julius Muldrow, who had seen enough of that style of campaigning for the present.

They descended the mountain to the broken ground below, and halted in the forest by the side of a bright little brook.

Hemlock Hank, who had not let go his hold of his captive, and had at the same time compelled him to keep quiet, made him sit down there, and regarded him with a glance of disgust.

The Kanuck, indeed, was by no means a prepossessing person to look at.

He was rather undersized, slim, black haired, nearly as dark in the face as a mulatto, with small eyes under heavy brows, and a sneaking, hangdog expression of countenance.

"I guess we've been bothered with this cuss about long enough," remarked the guide.

"Are you going to turn him loose?" inquired Terrapin Dick.

"Not jest yet."

"You don't mean to kill him, I hope?"

"Not quite so bad as that, though hangin' would help him some. Don't you remember, Dick, that we were sayin' a while ago, jest arter you got clear o' those skunks, that it would be a good thing to ketch a couple of 'em, an' tie 'em up, an' give 'em a larrupin'?"

"One of us said that, anyhow."

"Well, here's one of 'em, already ketched, and I guess he deserves a larrupin'. Do you know him, Dick Ridsen?"

"I think I do. Yes, I am sure of it."

"Was he one of the gang that gobbled you up and robbed you?"

"Yes, he was their leader, or acted as such."

"Then he does deserve a whalin', and he must have it. We'll give him a kind of a lesson ag'inst thievin', and turn him loose. There's got to be some sort o' justice out here in the woods, and that's the only kind that's handy."

The culprit Kanuck easily understood enough of what was said to know how his captors intended to treat him, and he began to howl for mercy, begging in a mixture of Canadian *patois* and English that he might be allowed to go free.

But his entreaties had no effect upon Hemlock Hank, who proceeded to tie him to a tree, requesting his companions to get a switch or two.

This portion of the programme was undertaken readily—in fact, eagerly—by Julius Muldrow, who hastened to cut two hickory switches, and was careful to get such as were stout and springy.

In fact, he proved himself a connoisseur in the matter of switches, though his aptness did not really excite the admiration of his companions.

More than that—he proposed to execute the sentence of the court of three, and even begged to be permitted to do the whipping.

Hemlock Hank, though strongly disgusted, assented to his offer, and told him to get to work.

Again the culprit begged piteously for mercy, and his yells pierced the silence of the forest.

"Look here, you darned skunk," said Hank, as he took the man by the ear; "you had better quit that howlin'. If you keep it up you'll git the switch harder an' more of it. So you'd better hold your yawp all you ken."

The guide and the detective walked aside a little distance, and Julius Muldrow addressed himself to his task.

It must have been a congenial one, to judge by the force and alacrity with which he plied the switch on the back of his helpless victim.

Though the Kanuck gritted his teeth, and doubtless strove to endure the infliction in silence, he could not help groaning, and at times screaming under the pain of the stinging strokes.

"Do you see that chap there?" said Hank, pointing at the eager executioner.

"I see enough of him," answered Terrapin Dick.

"Well, brother, I am keen to bet that when he was a baby he ached for chances to stick his fingers into other babies' eyes, and when he was a boy he worried cats and tied tin cans to dogs' tails."

"Yes, Hank, and when he was at school he would lay for smaller boys until he caught them alone, and then would take delight in pinching and beating them. And now—"

"Now? Why, Dick Ridsen, the man is miserable now onless he's hurtin' or houndin' or naggin' or worryin' somebody. He was born mean and cruel, and I guess there's nothin' on this airth that'll ever wipe it out o' him."

"He seems to take a real pleasure in whipping that poor devil."

"Yes, and I guess the poor devil has got enough. Mebbe he deserves more; but I don't want to see that chap git so much satisfaction out o' whalin' him."

Indeed, Julius Muldrow had worked at his self-imposed task until his arm was lame.

Just then he had thrown down one switch, and was resting himself for a moment, preparatory to beginning work with the other.

His two companions stepped up and put a summary stop to his pastime.

"That'll do, young gen'leman," said the guide. "The sentence of the court has been carried out, and we will turn him-loose now."

Muldrow's countenance fell at the moment; but instantly he flared up, rising in rebellion against the decree that deprived him of the remainder of the pleasure he had counted on.

"The job is hardly half-done yet," said he.

"Only one of the switches is used up."

"Well, we don't want the man to be used up—not quite. He may turn out to be o' some use in the world if he gits away from here alive. So we will let him go and give him a chance."

While Hank was speaking he was untying the

man from the tree, and directly he turned him loose.

Risden gave him some food from his sack, and the vagabond went his way, not rejoicing, but perhaps not as uncomfortable as he might have feared he would be.

The Americans were then in the humor for eating, and they made a meal without starting a fire.

When the guide and the detective sat down to smoke their pipes, Julius Muldrow went off and sulked by himself.

"I wonder," mused Terrapin Dick, "if that young man would have whipped the Kanuck to death."

"Dick Risden," solemnly remarked Hank Ward, "it ain't a bit surprisin' to me now to know that he'd shoot a fawn."

CHAPTER XXI.

A DASTARDLY DEED.

DICK RISDEN and Hank Ward, as they smoked meditative pipes after their cold meal, carefully considered the question of the move they should next make.

They soon settled between themselves upon what they had better do, but judged it proper to call their employer into their counsels and get his opinion.

As they considered it hardly the correct thing to call him to them, they went to where he was seated apart, placed the case before him, and asked his opinion.

"Well, I suppose you have got it all cut and dried," was his surly reply. "You have settled it between yourselves, and you only come to me as a matter of form. So there is nothing for me to do but follow your lead."

"We have our opinion," said the detective, "and we want yours. We are agreed that it is highly probable that the Sanders family, with the man we want, are inside of that hole in the hills where the water came out."

"There is somebody in there—no doubt of that."

"Exactly so. We don't know who the people are, but guess them to be the Sanders family. The question now is, under the circumstances, how we are going to get at them."

"There is one way plain enough," remarked Muldrow.

"The front door? Yes; but it is a narrow door, and the experience of the Kanucks has taught us caution. We don't want to be mistaken for them, or to get into the scrape that they got into. If the Sanders family—supposing them to be in there—should find out who we are and what we are after, it is likely that they would be keen to keep us at a distance."

"What have you decided on, then?"

"We have not decided on anything; but it seems to me and Hank Ward that there may be a back way by which we can get into that hole in the mountain, and that we had better try to find it."

"I knew it!" exclaimed Julius, with a tone and an air of disgust. "I was sure that you had settled on something that would take all winter and then amount to nothing. I can't for the life of me see why you two want to go all around Robin Hood's barn to do what ought to be done in a plain and straightforward manner. Of course you are paid for your time."

Hemlock Hank, disgusted with the turn the conversation was taking, walked away.

"But that don't quite account for it," mildly remarked Risden. "What do you think we ought to do, Mr. Muldrow?"

"I think we ought to quit doing things by halves, and go to work as if we meant business. Take the case of that thief we caught. He deserved a sound thrashing as a lesson to himself and a warning to his gang; but you men took pity on him, and turned him loose when the job was only half-done. Now you want to dilly-dally and beat about the bush, instead of going straight to the point."

"How shall we get to the point, then?"

"One of us ought to go in there, and see those people, and find out whether they are the Sanders family or not. If they are, they should be informed that we have a warrant for the arrest of Nick Sanders. If they refuse to allow it to be served, and defy the law, we will know how to act toward them."

"Exactly so. That is an excellent idea, Mr. Muldrow, and all it needs is a man to carry it into effect. I suppose you will volunteer for the purpose?"

"I volunteer?" indignantly replied the young man. "Not a bit of it. Why should I? I am not paid to do that sort of thing. There are two of you, and it is your business. I am only an outsider."

"And I suppose you intend to remain an outsider, as far as that hole in the mountain is concerned," suggested the detective. "The upshot of the scheme would probably be that the man who went in there would not come out for awhile. If I were the man, my usefulness as a detective would be at an end. If Hank Ward were the man, we could no longer count on him as a guide. Either of us would be missed."

"I suppose you mean to insinuate that I

would not be missed. If they are that sort of people, we ought to enforce the law against them, and fight our way in."

"As the Kanucks did? There are objections to that course, too."

"Perhaps you are afraid," sneered Julius.

"I don't think I am, and I am sure that Hank is not. But we ought not to punish the innocent with the guilty, and I have not yet reason to suppose that we have come up here on a man-killing expedition. I should particularly object to killing that lad who twice saved me from serious trouble. Besides, Mr. Muldrow, it is quite possible that they might prove to be too many for us, as they were for the Kanucks."

"You seem to have reasons as plenty as blackberries to-day, Mr. Risden. Have it your own way, then. You always do. But I have not the faintest hope that it will amount to anything."

Before nightfall the three searchers, under the guidance of Hemlock Hank, had climbed the mountain at a point a little distant from the gap that led to the Sanders' habitation, until they reached a wooded plateau, where they rested, and camped for the night near a spring.

In the morning, supposing that they had probably gone as high as they needed to go, they proceeded to explore the plateau, and traversed it in a northerly direction until it came to an end at the edge of a cliff.

This proved to be the very point which they had been anxious to strike.

From the edge of the cliff they could look down into the basin that was the home of the Sanders family, and could plainly see their house, their cultivated ground, and the dam that had held back the water of the pond until it was let loose for the benefit of the thieving Kanucks.

"They seem to be pretty well fixed there, whoever they are," observed Terrapin Dick.

"It must be a terrible place to pass the winter in," said Muldrow.

"Not so bad as you might suppose," replied Hank Ward. "As long as they get enough to eat and to wear they can be as comfortable as anybody, and there'll allers be plenty to eat as long as deer and moose are about. They may be drifted in by a heavy storm of snow an' wind; but they can dig out, and snow-shoes will carry 'em anywhere they want to go."

"That is all very nice," remarked the detective; "indeed, that is a right nice place down there, and I would like to be there. I may say that I don't know anything that would suit me better just now. But how are we to get there? That's the question that harrows up my soul."

It was a question of exceeding toughness, and a closer and more careful survey of the locality did not tend to promote its solution.

The basin was deep, and the cliff from which they viewed it was so precipitous that its descent seemed to be out of the question.

The gap side was equally inaccessible, except by the gap, and on the northern and western sides, which formed nearly a semicircle, the mountain sloped upward, abrupt and bare.

It was not exactly precipitous in that quarter, and a man might slide down to the bottom; but he would not be a man when he reached it.

The conclusion they arrived at was that they should camp there on the plateau, until they could make a closer and more complete survey of the locality, so as to determine whether they would be able to reach their prey from that direction.

For this purpose it was necessary to bring up some supplies from their caches on the lake, and Dick Risden volunteered to go after them, considering himself by that time sufficiently well acquainted with the region to be able to find his way there and back without difficulty.

He set out accordingly, leaving his companions to continue the exploration, or to amuse themselves as they pleased.

Hemlock Hank chose to look about, and he continued the search through the greater part of the remainder of the day, but without making any progress to boast of.

Wherever he went Julius Muldrow was either close at his heels or kept him in sight.

It must have been his adventure with the bear that caused the young man to be so strongly opposed to being left alone.

The guide, however, made one important discovery.

He got into a position from which he could see something that was highly interesting as bearing upon the problem to be solved.

What he saw was the Sanders family as they left the house and went to work upon the dam which had been opened for the purpose of deluging the Kanucks.

They did not all go out at once; but in the course of the day each member of the family was visible about the pond.

Thus Hank was able to count them, and he easily made them out to be four in number—three who counted as men, a woman, and a boy.

"You see," remarked the guide, as he pointed them out to Julius Muldrow, "that they'd ha' been too much for us if we'd tried to git in through the hole."

"Do you count the woman and the boy?" contemptuously inquired Julius.

"I do, indeed, and you would find that they would count if you should tackle 'em. I'm keen to bet that the woman can do a man's part at workin' or fightin', and as for the boy, I guess he must be the chap that taught Dick Risden how to kill wildcats. You'd find him as bad to fool with as a bear."

This fling drew a malignant glance from Muldrow, and Hemlock Hank sought another point of observation.

He found it on the small trunk of a dead pine, which had fallen over the edge of the cliff, and extended out into space a considerable distance.

Hemlock Hank examined this trunk, and came to the conclusion that by going out upon it he could get a better view of the region below than he had yet been able to obtain.

The fact that the butt was on the plateau seemed to make the venture safe.

"I guess it's all right," said he; "but I wish, Mr. Muldrow, that you would sit on the butt there, so that there mayn't be any danger o' tippin' up."

Julius seated himself on the log, and the guide carefully made his way out from the edge of the cliff toward the small end of the tree.

When he had got pretty well out he paused and surveyed the situation for a while.

But he was not yet satisfied with his outlook, and began to crawl further on.

"Keep a-settin' there, young gentleman," said he, "cause, if you should git up, it might be kinder resky."

What was it, then, that put it into Julius Muldrow's head to do a dastardly and murderous deed?

Was it the mean and vicious nature that was born in him, and that through years of indulgence had become incapable of control?

Or was it his envious and jealous hatred of Hemlock Hank, which had cropped out on several previous occasions, and which he had cherished and fostered until it had become a passion?

Or was it simply an insane impulse?

Whatever the cause, the deed was done, and done quickly.

He not only jumped up from the log, but took hold of it with both hands, and lifted with all his strength.

It tilted easily, and the result was frightfully sudden.

Hemlock Hank had only time to cast one startled and reproachful glance backward, and then he dropped helplessly down with the dead pine tree.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN UNWELCOME GUEST.

BEN LAWSON was so disgusted with his brief experience of Julius Muldrow's ingratitude and insolence, that when he quitted the camp which contained that obnoxious young man, he retraced his course down the river.

"The fact is, Neptune," he said to his guide, "that I could not stay where that young fellow is, or anywhere near him. I should be tempted to spoil his looks, and would not be able to resist the temptation."

"Bad sort o' man," assented the Indian.

"As mean a cur, I think, as I ever met. I can't look at him without itching to kick him. The two men with him are different, and I would be glad to camp and tramp with them."

"Hemlock Hank mighty good man, boss."

"No doubt of that. As square and true a man as walks the earth, in the woods or out of them. I have reason to believe that the other is a good man, too—nothing the matter with him that I know of—and you know that he behaved well when we met them with the boat and stuff. Yes, they are both decent white men—what I call gentlemen—and good company anywhere. But I was glad to get away from that sneak."

"Where you go now?" inquired Neptune.

"I am going back to Staley's. I want to look up the man I spoke to you about—the man who had such a strange and knowing look on his face when I spoke of the murder at Cranston. That man has been preying on my mind ever since, and I have been sorry that I did not stop there and watch him and pump him. But I was in a hurry to get on and find those other people, and when I found them I could do nothing but get away from them. It is a pity for Hemlock Hank and his partner that they are tied to such a crank. But I will go back to Staley's now, and there is a chance that I may get hold of the right end of the string."

Ben Lawson had a way of speaking to his companion as if he were talking to himself, and perhaps he was musing and meditating, quite as much as seeking to convey information.

Neptune understood this, and did not always pretend to follow the drift of his leader's remarks, though he respected him highly as a man and a woodsman.

Indeed, he would not be able to comprehend all that Lawson said, if he had used his best endeavors, and it was not worth while to exert himself, as the "Boss" always spoke plainly enough when he wished to impress any fact upon the mind of his guide.

He understood enough to know that the in-

tention was to return to Staley's, and he intimated that the change of programme suited him very well.

They were obliged to pass another night in the woods before reaching the Penobscot, and at the camp they had a fresh and somewhat singular experience.

It was about dusk, and they had cooked a savory meal, which they were proceeding to enjoy, when they were startled by the arrival of a stranger.

It was quite natural that they should be startled, as he appeared before them suddenly and without the slightest warning, as if he had risen from the ground before their eyes.

Perhaps he was attracted to the spot by the very pleasant odor of their evening meal as it was wafted through the forest by a gentle breeze that drew up the stream.

He surely had the appearance of a person to whom the attraction of that odor would be irresistible.

A more disconsolate, woebegone, and utterly used-up individual it would be hard to imagine.

His clothes, originally of cheap and poor quality, were badly worn, covered with grease and dirt, and adorned only with tatters.

His body was attenuated, his face wan and shrunken, and his entire appearance spoke of a grievous lack of food, if not of actual starvation.

His condition was partly accounted for by the fact that he had no weapon other than a hunting-knife.

The country and quality of the stranger could easily be inferred, considering the time and place of his appearance, from his straight black hair, his beady black eyes, his yellow skin, and his furtive, sinister expression of countenance.

He was Kanuck from Kanuckdom—doubtless a mixture of Canadian French and Indian—probably one of the prowling band that was then infesting the woods.

But at that moment he could be considered as nothing but an object of compassion.

"Hello, Kanuck!" said Lawson, as he looked up from his supper. "What do you want?"

"Hungry," was the man's brief reply, as he pointed at his open mouth.

"Well, you look it. Sit down, and we will see what we can do for you."

Lawson mixed some rum and water in a tin cup, and gave it to the Kanuck.

He drank it greedily, and his leathery countenance expressed his satisfaction.

"By rights," remarked Ben, "he ought to be made to wash himself before we feed him; but I don't know that I ought to press it on him. What do you think, Neptune?"

"Might kill 'um."

"That's so, and we won't take any risks. Give him plenty of bread and meat, Nep, and make him go off and devour it by himself. But don't send him too far, as I will have something to say to him after a little."

The stranger was liberally supplied with food, and he went aside as he was directed to, and consumed it ravenously.

Doubtless he could have eaten more; but he did not ask for more, and Lawson was of the opinion that he had been stuffed sufficiently.

When he had finished his own supper Ben hunted up an old pipe, filled it with tobacco, and gave it to the stranger.

The unwelcome and unpleasant guest appeared to be immensely thankful for the favors that had been bestowed upon him, and doubtless he was.

As he had been on the verge of starvation, from which he was almost miraculously saved, he was bound to feel grateful, if his nature was half-human.

He showed no desire to leave the good company into which he had fallen, but sat and smoked the black pipe with a keen relish, expressing his thanks as volubly as he could in his broken English and Kanuck *patois*.

"You are welcome," replied Ben Lawson, "though I am afraid that you don't deserve it. Were you one of the Kanucks who stole a boat and a lot of campers' stuff up the river a few nights ago?"

The stranger held up his hands in horror when this question was made plain to him by Neptune, who easily understood his mixed-up talk, and he vehemently protested that he had not been guilty of that transaction or of anything similar to it.

"Do you think that he was one of the gang we scattered, Nep?" inquired the "Boss."

The guide could not recognize him, nor did Ben, and he was counted clear of that accusation.

"But, if you were not in that scrape," said Lawson, "you have been in others, no doubt, and plenty of them. I suppose you belong to the band that has been prowling about here."

Further investigation and cross-examination, conducted by Neptune under the direction of "Boss Ben," confirmed the truth of this supposition, though it was hard to wring the facts from the suspected party.

He did belong, or had belonged, to such a prowling band as was mentioned, but was free from them then, as he said, and preferred to have nothing more to do with them.

"How did you happen to get clear of them?" Lawson then wanted to know.

The answer was that he had got mad and left them.

"That is queer. Of course you had a rifle. What has become of that?"

"Lost it."

"That is queer, too. Why did you get mad and leave your partners?"

"Dose Kanucks got 'um 'nodder cap'n—sorter 'Merican man."

"And your nose was put out of joint, hey? Who was the other man?"

"Joe Jeffard."

CHAPTER XXIII.

EXTREME INGRATITUDE.

BEN LAWSON started up so suddenly at the name of Joe Jeffard, that the Kanuck shrunk away as if fearing that his host was about to strike him.

But that was far from being Ben's intention.

Though he had before been merely compassionate toward his unwelcome guest, he was now overflowing with friendship for him.

He extended his hand in the heartiest manner, while his face was bright with smiles.

"Don't get scared, Kanuck!" he exclaimed. "I wouldn't hurt a hair of your head, or even disturb one of its inhabitants. Give me your fist, old fellow! You are the finest specimen of a man I have met in a day or two. I wouldn't have missed you for more money than you ever saw. Nep, get a cup of rum and water for our friend here, and put in some sugar, and make it stiff."

The guide, who was astonished at this ebullition, hastened to obey the order, but with frowns and shakes of the head, as if he feared that "Boss Ben" had gone crazy.

The stranger, who was equally amazed, allowed his hand to be shaken by his host, while he stared at him in blank bewilderment.

But the former was soon restored to his equilibrium by the production of a potent dram, which gave him great inward satisfaction, and put him on good terms with the world.

"Let me fill up your pipe, old fellow," said Ben, "and then we will sit down and have a sociable smoke."

It soon turned out that the dram was intended as an aid in extracting information, as one will pour water into a dry pump to start its suction.

The Kanuck under its influence, and with the promise of more, was quite amenable to the process of pumping, which Ben conducted vigorously, with the occasional assistance of Neptune as an interpreter.

His name, as he admitted, was Antoine Jaunot, and he had been the leader of the band of prowling Kanucks until the advent of the interloper Joe Jeffard, who had ousted him from his position, and had degraded him—if he could be degraded.

Consequently he hated Jeffard, and abused him most unintelligibly.

"Now let us see about this Jeffard," said the friendly Lawson. "I want to know what he is like. You say that he is a sort of an American. I suppose, then, that he may have been born in Canada."

Jaunot admitted that his enemy was a Canadian by birth.

"And perhaps it was because he had lived down country, and had picked up smartness there, that your partners considered him a better man than you, and put him in your place."

Yes, it was a fact, as the Kanuck admitted, that Jeffard had lived down country, and was supposed on that account to be a wise and capable man.

"Now I want a description of Joe Jeffard—as good a photograph of him as you can make."

This request having been explained to the Kanuck by Neptune, he proceeded to describe the personal appearance of Joe Jeffard, materially assisted by hints from Ben Lawson.

As the picture progressed, and the lines were more clearly drawn, a light seemed to dawn upon the mind of the Indian.

"Oho!" he exclaimed.

"You see the point, then," quickly remarked Lawson. "This Joe Jeffard is the man we saw at Staley's—the man who has been preying upon my mind. But there is a great deal more than that about him. He is the very man I want to find—the man I came up here to look after. I mean to get hold of him, too, if I have to catch and skin every thieving Kanuck in the country, except this one."

"Ketch this 'un, and keep um," suggested Neptune.

"Just so. That is what I mean to do, and I only wish I could get him clean. I shall enlist him in my service, with good pay and rations. Now you see, Nep, why I looked upon him as a kind of a boon, and why his mention of the name of Joe Jeffard touched a spring in me, as it were."

Ben Lawson was again talking for his own benefit, and the guide did not clearly comprehend him.

But he understood the next words well enough.

"Bring him some more rum, Nep, and mix it

strong. This is going to be banyan day for him."

When the guide had given their guest another tin cup filled with rum and water, he stood behind Jaunot's back, curiously inspecting him from that point of view.

"What is the matter, Nep?" asked watchful Ben Lawson. "What do you see there?"

Neptune pointed at the Kanuck's back, and Lawson also inspected it, greatly to the discomposure of his guest.

"See here, Kanuck!" he exclaimed. "What does this mean? What sort of a circus have you been in, anyhow? Pull off your coat, and let us take a look at you."

Jaunot protested against this exposure; but, in spite of his objections, his ragged coat was removed, and the marks of a recent severe whipping were visible on his back.

"Merican man whippa me," he confessed, when confession could no longer be avoided.

He was induced to confess further, and told the story as it suited him to tell it, leaving out a large portion.

His story was that three Americans had caught him in the woods, had tied him to a tree, and, for no cause in the world, one of them had whipped him with hickory switches.

He was requested to describe the men, and they were recognized by his hosts.

"Those must be our friends whose plunder we caught for them," said Lawson. "How long is it since we left them, Nep?"

"Tree, four day," answered the Indian.

"Time enough for them to attend to our friend Jaunot. Yes, they are the parties. No doubt they had good cause for what they did. Well, Kanuck, I hope it won't occur again. All you have to do is to stay with me, or to do as I tell you, and you will be well treated."

Before they laid down to sleep Neptune suggested that it would be well for one of them to keep watch, as their guest was a very uncertain character, who might play them false.

"I guess we needn't worry about that," replied Lawson. "He must be too well satisfied with his present quarters to want to change them or get kicked out of them."

They made Jaunot lie down to rest near them, and Neptune resolved that for his part his sleeping should be done with one eye open, so that he might keep it on the Kanuck.

His intention was good; but nature was too much for him that time.

He fell into a deep sleep, from which he awoke with a start, and the start aroused Lawson.

The moon was shining brightly, and everything that was within the range of their vision could be distinctly seen.

But Antoine Jaunot was not within the range of their vision.

He had disappeared.

They reached for their rifles as they jumped up, but they were also gone.

A faint sound of oars dipping called their attention to the river.

They rushed to the bank, and saw their skiff at a little distance from the shore.

Jaunot was seated in it, and he had just settled back to the oars with the intention of pulling swiftly down-stream.

As he had taken the weapons of his late entertainers, he doubtless considered himself safe, in spite of their speedy discovery of his rascality.

Neptune, wild with rage, was about to throw himself into the water and pursue the robber by swimming, but was restrained by his chief.

Lawson held in his right hand a coil of light line, which was nothing less than a lasso he had brought from the plains.

As he stepped to the bank he drew back his arm and flung forth the coil, which flew in circles through the moonlit air over the quiet water until the loop settled down upon the body of the unsuspecting carman.

Instantly it was pulled taut, confining his arms to his body.

Antoine Jaunot, surprised and confounded by this unlooked-for style of attack, uttered a piercing yell.

As he was jerked from his seat he seized the gunwale of the boat, to prevent himself from being pulled overboard.

Thus Ben Lawson hauled in the man and the skiff together, until he brought them to the shore.

Neptune secured the skiff, and his chief collared the prisoner and marched him back to the camp.

In the skiff were found both the missing rifles, with several other articles of value.

How the rascal had succeeded in leaving the camp and carrying off his plunder with the boat without awaking his companions was a mystery to them, as it was hard even for experienced woodsmen to conceive of such noiseless movements.

"He is the most wonderful sneak thief I ever heard of," remarked Lawson, "and he could make a fortune at that business if he had proper opportunities; but he was born to blush unseen, and waste his fragrance on the desert air."

This sentiment struck the Indian as having a fine sound, though he did not pretend to under-

and it, and he stared reverently at his chief, who had been greatly raised in his estimation by his feat with the lasso.

As for Jaunot, he had not a word to say for himself.

He, also, had been overpowered mentally, as well as physically, by the fling of the lasso, and realized the fact that it was useless to fight against fate as represented by Ben Lawson.

He made no appeal for mercy, and did not even whimper, but quietly submitted to being tied securely and laid on the ground to rest during the remainder of the night.

In the morning he was there safe enough, and Neptune wanted to know what was to be done with him.

"Gib um big whippin' I guess so," was the Indian's suggestion.

"Nothing of the kind," replied Lawson. "We will give him a good breakfast. I don't blame the man for what he did, Nep. He couldn't help it. He was born a thief, was brought up a thief, and has never had a chance to be anything but a thief. He would steal his grandmother's spectacles, if he could find nothing else to take. Just think of his stealing from us, after what we had done for him! Why, the very enormity of the offense, showing the quintessence of ingratitude, speaks of a species of insanity."

This was far beyond the comprehension of the Indian, and he contented himself with staring.

"We will return good for evil," continued Ben. "The only punishment that could cure him of stealing would be one that would leave no life in him. I think it better to buy him than to break him. I shall try to persuade him to steal on our side."

The astonishment of Jaunot at this turn in his affairs was only equaled by his effusive thankfulness.

No doubt he had fully expected that the outcome of his exploit would be nothing less than another whipping, which would be very severe upon his sore back.

When he was untied and placed before a hot and savory breakfast, with full license to stuff himself to his utmost capacity, he broke down, burst into tears, and seemed to be honestly and thoroughly penitent.

After breakfast Lawson gave him a pipe and a quantity of tobacco, and detailed to him some careful instructions as to his future movements, which he swore by all the saints to faithfully observe.

He was also promised a rifle, and a good outfit generally, if his efforts in the cause of his new friend should prove successful.

Then he was loaded with provisions, and was sent on his way rejoicing.

CHAPTER XXIV.

JOE JEFFARD.

WHEN Ben Lawson and his guide reached Staley's tavern on the Penobscot they were heartily welcomed by the proprietor, Sam Staley, who had been favorably impressed by Lawson's manhood and his liberality on the occasion of his brief stay there a little while ago.

Staley's was rather better than most of the rude hostleries that were scattered through the wilderness, being a pretty substantial log building, with sufficient outhouses.

It contained a bar, of course, a cook-room that also served as a sitting-room, sleeping accommodations for travelers, such as they were, and a shelter for supplies and other articles that were left there for safe-keeping or to be forwarded.

Sam Staley was a stalwart six-footer, easy-going, and not too pinch-fingered, in his dealings.

His household consisted of his wife, his nearly grown son Tom, and an Irishman named Mike Molloy, who was employed as a man of all work.

Occasionally guests were to be met there—hunters, timber-prospectors and the like—but they amounted only to a few stragglers until winter set in, and logging began, and the regular teamsters, or drogers, came up from below with loads of supplies for the logging-camps.

There was one guest at the tavern when Lawson and his guide arrived, and they recognized him at once.

He was the same man whom they had previously met there—the man who had preyed upon Lawson's mind—the man who had been described to them by Antoine Jaunot as Joe Jeffard.

He was a tall man, inclined to be lean and lanky, with a thin face that would have been cadaverous if it had not been bloated and discolored by his recent extravagant use of liquor.

His hair was black, and his eyes were dark, and his face was heavily bearded, and the expression of so much of his countenance as could be seen was not such as might induce a stranger to cultivate his acquaintance.

His age might have been guessed at any figure between thirty and forty; but he was probably not as old as he seemed to be.

As to his attire, it was of stout and substantial stuff, suited in quality and style to a life in the

woods, and had presented a good appearance not long since, when it was new; but his habits, rather than the wear and tear of the forest, had given it a shabby and disreputable look.

He had evidently been drinking heavily, and was seated on a stool in a half doze when the strangers came in, hardly glancing at them as they entered.

They took scarcely any more notice of him, being easily satisfied as to who he was, and went on to respond to the pleasant greetings of Sam Staley and his son Tom, to whom Lawson gave directions for the care of his "plunder" and the safe bestowal of his skiff.

"How did you happen to git back so soon?" inquired Staley. "I thought you meant to go 'way off and take a big hunt."

"I got tired of that," answered Ben. "We went up to the head of that creek which you called a river—that is, we went on until the bottom came up to the top—and there was no way of going further but by footing it. That disgusted me, and I chose to come back here and take a fresh start, or to go home."

"Better stay here a while and think it over," suggested Staley. "I'd be tarnation glad to have you around."

"Perhaps I may, if you will treat me well."

"I will do my best, Mr. Lawson. You can bet high on that."

Lawson proceeded to patronize the bar, inviting the landlord, his son, and Neptune—an invitation which the last one eagerly accepted.

He also called up the man on the stool, who was not too drowsy to hear the "invite," but came forward after the manner of a bummer in a city gin-mill.

Thus Ben formed the acquaintance of Joe Jeffard, and he lost no time in cultivating it.

He had noticed that the landlord's treatment of the guest in possession was rather off-hand and none too friendly, from which fact he drew the conclusion that Jeffard was not a welcome guest.

It was probable that he was given to drinking more than was good for him, and that he was short of money—two circumstances of which Ben expected to avail himself.

There was one question which was a little puzzling.

What was the man doing there, if he had become the leader of the band of Kanucks?

Jaunot's description of him had been so accurate that the rest of that scamp's statements must be accepted as true.

The supposition was that the operations of the vagabonds were not such as might be held to constitute a flourishing business, and that the liquors at Staley's had strong attractions for Jeffard.

This was one of the points that Lawson proposed to investigate.

When Tom Staley and Neptune had gone out to look after the skiff and its contents, he called for more rum, and seated himself at a rude table near his "subject," whom he invited to partake of the fluid from Medford.

The offer was accepted, and the inviter proceeded to put his pumping apparatus in operation.

But there was one quality lacking in Ben Lawson.

He was not sufficiently endowed with secretiveness to become a good detective.

He was too straightforward and out-spoken—apt to blurt out his thoughts without regard to consequences, and not inclined to try to get at information in a sly and shady manner.

Perhaps, too, he supposed that Jeffard's half-inebriated condition had so blunted his intelligence as to make him an easy subject for the operations of the pump.

If that was his idea, he soon had reason to believe that it was a mistaken one.

Jeffard was willing enough to absorb the rum he bought, but was alert and on his guard as soon as a subject was broached that concerned himself.

"Seems to me that I must have met you somewhere down country," remarked Lawson. "There is something in your face that is familiar to me."

"Rum blossoms?" suggested the other.

"Not that, exactly. At least, there was nothing of the kind in your face when I met you—if I did meet you. Were you ever in a village named Cranston?"

"Never heard of such a place," was the stolid reply.

"No? I thought I might have seen you there. That is the village where a murder was committed some time ago. An old lady was strangled in her bed. Perhaps you have heard of it."

"Yes—I heard you talking about it when you were here before."

"You remember that, hey?"

"Yes, and you took such a lively interest in it that I wondered if you were the man who murdered her."

"I don't happen to be that man, and I don't know who the man is, or was, or may have been. There is a man who is accused of the murder—a poor devil named Nick Sanders, and some people are sure that he is guilty.—Sam, bring us some more rum, please.—It is said that he is somewhere in this part of the country, and

there are men out in the woods hunting him. Have you met any such men?"

"Not that I know of," answered Jeffard, as he gulped down another cup of rum. "I only mind my own business."

"What is your business, if it is a fair question?"

"Drinking rum."

There was a quizzical look on Jeffard's face during this interview—a partial closing of one eye, and a suspicion of a sneer under his mustache.

Clearly he was more wide awake than he appeared to be, and fully aware of the object of his entertainer.

He was not drunk enough yet to be successfully pumped, and it was doubtful whether there was rum enough at Staley's to fit him for the process.

"That is a good business," observed Ben Lawson—"for the man who sells the rum. It is a business that the man who drinks it is likely to stick to if he gets a fair hold of it, until it gets a foul hold of him, and downs him. I should think, my friend—Have another drink?—that you might find some business that would be more profitable in the end. Have you been sticking to Staley's ever since I was here before?"

"No," was the surly answer.

"Been off in the woods some, perhaps."

"Maybe so. I take a hunt whenever I feel like it."

"As we all do. In the course of your hunts have you happened to come across a gang of thieving Kanucks who are prowling about the woods, picking up whatever they can lay their hands on?"

"No."

"That is queer. I have heard of a man among them who exactly answers to your description, and I had supposed that you might be that man."

If Joe Jeffard had not drunk his senses away, he had drank himself into a quarrelsome mood; and had been rapidly approaching the fighting verge.

He jumped up, red-eyed, wrathful, and roaring.

He was a formidable customer to look at, too, as he carried a revolver and a knife in plain sight.

"I've had enough of you!" he shouted. "You have been insulting me ever since I sat down here, and I have stood all I mean to stand from you. First you pitch on me about a murder, and then about a gang of Kanucks. You might as well try to make me out a murderer and a thief. I have a great mind to lick you."

Ben Lawson had also risen, and seemed to be surprised at this outburst.

"To lick me?" he mildly inquired.

"Yes—to whip you—to flog you—to smash your head."

"Don't try it, my friend. You couldn't whip one side of me. Cool down, and let your great mind become small by degrees and beautifully less. You needn't make any motion toward your pistol. You could never begin to shoot as quick as I can. Better cool down."

At that moment the heavy paw of Sam Staley was laid on Jeffard's shoulder, and the stalwart landlord took a hand in the game.

"You've got to go away from here," said he. "You drink too much rum, and make a darned nuisance of yourself. More'n that, you don't pay for what you git. When you went away the last time, you promised to come back and pay; but you've only run deeper in debt. Now you've got to clear out, and you'd better do it peaceably."

"I will go," replied Jeffard, who had evidently taken Lawson's advice and cooled down.

"Where is my rifle?"

"Here it is. Clear out, now, and don't come here ag'in."

"If you think I won't come here again," said Jeffard as he turned to go, "you are fooled."

CHAPTER XXV.

JAUNOT KEEPS FAITH.

"It seems to me that I didn't manage that business quite as well as it might have been managed," muttered Ben Lawson, as he looked after the unsteadily retreating form of Jeffard.

"What's that you say, Mr. Lawson?" inquired the landlord.

"I wanted to get some information out of that fellow—information that might be very valuable to me and some other people—but I missed it. He was not as drunk as I thought he was, and my pump failed to work. I was just saying that I was afraid I had not managed it well."

"I'm sorry for that, Mr. Lawson. If you want to try it again, I think I can get him back here, and we will squeeze it out of him."

"He may come back without being sent for. He said he would, and, from what I know of the man, I am inclined to believe that he will. He may come back in a way that won't be agreeable to you. What name has he gone by here?"

"He calls himself Jim Jeffers."

"That is something like his real name, which is Joe Jeffard. You have heard, I suppose, of a band of thieving Kanucks who have been prowling

ing about this region. That man has lately become their leader. He is capable of mischief, and may make it, with them to back him."

"Do you think he may take a notion to make a strike at this tavern?" inquired Staley.

"It is quite likely. But I think I have a sort of a pull on the gang, and may hear of it if they mean to try that game."

Lawson then related his adventure in the woods with Antoine Jaunot, and detailed the information he had extracted from that individual concerning Jeffard.

"I guess you are right about it," said the landlord. "There is a chance that he may light down on me. He is a scamp and a loafer, if not a darned sight wuss. Let 'em come, though. Nothin' 'ud suit me better than to clean out a pack of greasy, thievin' Kanucks. Only I'd like to know when to expect 'em."

"I think I can depend on the Kanuck I caught," remarked Lawson, "to let me know what is going on."

"That's a mighty poor dependence, Mr. Lawson. Those skunks are as slippery as eels and as mean as snakes. Their word ain't worth a dog's notice, and they hain't got the least idea of honesty or gratitude or anythin' in the line of decency."

"We must try to be ready for them, then, at any time. I would be glad to catch that scamp of a Jeffard in a way that would give me a hold on him. As it is, I am afraid that I have botched the business with him at the start."

Lawson was in no hurry to leave Staley's tavern, either to go down the river or to take a fresh start into the woods.

The landlord was as good as his word, treating his guest as well as he was able to, and Lawson and Neptune kept the house well supplied with meat from the forest and the water, without going far to hunt or fish.

Ben was also waiting for some letters from below, which finally arrived, and gave him both pain and pleasure.

As the letters were from Mary Payson, he made no mention of their contents to anybody; but it could be seen that they made him more restless and uneasy than he had been.

His restlessness was caused by his anxiety to capture Joe Jeffard, who, as he believed, possessed some important information which he wished to acquire.

But he did not know how he was to get hold of the man, or, if he should find him, how he was to squeeze the truth out of him.

Accompanied by Neptune he made a long scout into the woods, but failed to come across the band of Kanucks, or to discover any traces of them.

Another excursion was undertaken for the purpose of seeking Dick Ridsen, whose advice he wished to get, and whose services he would have been glad to secure.

This expedition was also a failure, as he found no signs of the detective and his party, and he was at his wits' end to know how to accomplish his object.

In the mean time he did not see Antoine Jaunot, and heard nothing of the vagabond Kanucks.

In the mean time, too, as the season advanced, loggers were beginning to come into the woods quite numerous, to prospect for timber, cut wild hay, clear out the small streams, and prepare camp for the work of the winter.

Boat-loads of supplies were brought up for their use as required, a considerable portion of which found storage at Staley's.

These goods and provisions, in addition to his winter stock, which the landlord was getting in, amounted in value to a considerable sum.

Guests were scarce, too, as the travelers who passed there were always in a hurry to get on to their destinations and attend to their duties.

That was the time for Joe Jeffard, if he wished to strike a blow at Staley's tavern that might profit him and his band.

It was soon made evident that he was aware of his opportunity, and that he meant to take advantage of it.

Lawson and Neptune were out hunting, not far from the tavern, when they met Antoine Jaunot.

It is likely that they would not have met him if he had not come forward and made himself known, as he flitted about them like a shadow until he was satisfied that there was nobody else within sight or hearing, when he allowed himself to be seen.

In his attire he was no less greasy and shabby than when they last saw him; but he seemed to have been fairly well fed, and had a rifle.

His statement, as extracted from his broken English and Canadian *patois*, was to the effect that he had rejoined the band, and had found the rifle which he lost.

He had made his peace with the other vagabonds and with Joe Jeffard by submitting to the rule of the new leader, and taking a subordinate position under him.

At the same time he hated Jeffard no less than before, and wished above all things to bring him to grief.

It was this desire, possibly connected with a

feeling which might pass for gratitude, that had caused him to keep faith with Ben Lawson and act as a spy in his interest.

At last he had got hold of an important piece of news.

The Kanucks had learned of the stores that were being collected at Staley's, and, incited by Jeffard, had determined to make a raid upon the tavern.

None of their members had been lost by the attack on the Sanders stronghold, and they had accumulated plenty of ammunition and other necessities by successful thieving from parties of prospectors.

The coming night was the time fixed upon for the attempt on the tavern, and Jaunot, while desirous that none of his compatriots should be hurt, was extremely anxious that Joe Jeffard should be caught and severely punished, if he should not happen to get killed.

"We will attend to his case, you may be sure," said Ben Lawson, "and we won't kill any Kanucks if we can help it; though, if it should come to shooting, they are as likely to get in the way of bullets as anybody."

He praised Jaunot for the faithful manner in which he had thus far obeyed instructions, promised him that he should be rewarded for further assistance, and gave him such a sum of money as made the vagabond's eyes glisten.

"Try to keep yourself out of harm's way," he said at parting, "and come to the tavern if you can after the picnic is over. Then I will have something more to say to you."

Antoine Jaunot went his way, and Lawson and his guide hastened back to the tavern to carry the news to the landlord.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TAVERN ATTACKED.

SAM STALEY evinced no surprise at the information that was brought to him of the expected raid upon his property, and his excitement was pleasurable, rather than otherwise.

"If the thing has got to come off," said he, "the sooner it is over and done with, the better for us, if not for all hands. It's a darned good thing that we know when to look for 'em, and I guess a little skrimmage won't do us any harm."

This was the opinion of all the household, with the exception of Mrs. Staley, who was not anxious for excitement, but preferred peace and quiet.

"Sam says that it'll stir our blood," she remarked; "but mine don't need no stirrin', and I hope the Kanucks will keep away. I'd rather fill 'em with victuals than with lead, any day or night."

"But it will be a good thing for us, Sally," persisted her husband. "If we can give those cusses a good wallop, it will be a warnin' to others of their sort to keep away from us."

The men at the tavern considered themselves easily a match for their expected adversaries.

There were five of them, and they were well armed, and the log-house would serve them well as a fortification.

Moreover, they had no respect for the prowess of the Kanucks.

Mike Molloy delighted in boasting of the style in which he had polished off three in a logging-camp with his naked fists, as they came at him one after another.

Neptune, who knew how tough and wiry most of those scamps were, and how silently and secretly they could move, was not so sanguine as the others, but had no fears of the result.

Before night they put their weapons in order, and arranged the interior of the house for fighting purposes so that they deemed it proof against attack.

Their only fear was that, as it was impossible with their small force to guard the entire establishment, their foes might set fire to some of the outbuildings.

After supper they lighted their pipes, and divided themselves between the two main rooms of the house, all apparently wakeful enough to watch the night out.

It was soon found necessary to put the bar's supply of liquors under lock and key, lest Neptune's besetting sin should put him out of the fight before it began.

"Forewarned is forearmed," is an old saying and a true one.

But no amount of forewarning and forearming might be sufficient to guard against surprise by such accomplished sneaks as Joe Jeffard's gang.

The early hours of the night went slowly by, and the expected attack was not made.

There was no moon, and the night was hazy and quite dark, favoring the purposes of the raiders, who doubtless meant to take advantage of the obscurity.

Again and again the watchers in the tavern sallied out around the house in detachments of two at a time to watch for the approaching foe.

They strained their eyes in the darkness, and held their ears to the ground, but neither saw nor heard anything of their enemies.

Finally they settled down to a long siege of waiting inside of the house, and attempted to pass the time by "swapping lies."

Their stock of stories ran short, conversation

dwindled and dried up, and most of them were dozing or snoozing, when they were startled by a series of screams from the pig-pen, which was at a little distance from the house in the rear.

"They're after the pigs!" shouted Mike Molloy, as he seized his rifle and rushed to the defense of his especial charges and pets.

Mrs. Staley, who was at least equally interested in the porkers, grabbed an ax and followed the Irishman.

The others hastened to the back door, ready for war, and expecting to meet the enemy there.

But the noise at the pig-pen quickly ceased, and when Mike reached that locality he declared that there was nobody in sight.

The attack, when it came at last, was made in an unexpected and really strategic manner.

While Sam Staley and his friends were grouped near the back door, wondering what could have been the matter with the pigs, their attention was suddenly called to the other end of the house by a thundering blow on the front door.

Another blow followed, and the door was torn from its fastenings and fell inward.

The assailants, it appeared, had detailed one of their number to make a demonstration in the rear by stirring up the porkers, while the others prepared to batter in the front door with a piece of timber they had picked up.

This strategy was so successful that they were pouring into the house before its defenders could come forward to meet them.

This was a very serious business.

It was recognized as such by Staley and his followers; but they were equal to the emergency, and rushed eagerly to the onset.

The struggle that ensued in the dimly-lighted front room was a closer and more sanguinary one than they had anticipated.

Rifles were quickly thrown aside, and pistols were brought into vigorous play, to be followed by fists, stools, and such other weapons as could be picked up.

For a few minutes the room was filled with the flash and smoke of powder, and resounded with the mingled noise of shots, shouts, yells, falling bodies and breaking furniture.

Mrs. Staley contributed largely to the confusion by dashing into the *melee* with a pail of boiling water, which she flung upon the Kanucks, or attempted to, though her friends did not miss a share of the scalding baptism.

This diversion virtually put an end to the fight, which had been getting to be rather one-sided.

Though the Kanucks outnumbered the Americans, the latter were the heavier and stronger party, and they were fighting on their own ground.

They were not only defending their home, but were acquainted with the locality.

Sam Staley, almost a giant in size, picked up one of the assailants bodily, and threw him out of the open door.

Ben Lawson was rapid and businesslike with his pistol-shots, and did effective work when he put his muscle into the *melee*.

Mike Molloy was an eager and vigorous fighter, and Neptune and Tom Staley, cool, quick and steady, rendered good service.

Mrs. Staley's deluge of scalding water completed the job, and those of the Kanucks who were able to get away made themselves scarce as speedily as possible.

Nobody saw Joe Jeffard in the house during the combat, though his voice was plainly heard as he ordered and encouraged his comrades.

Sam Staley declared that when he threw his man out of the door the human missile struck against Jeffard and knocked him over.

Ben Lawson rushed out of the house, hoping to catch the man he wanted.

He caught sight of him as he was making his way through the timber toward the river, and ran after him.

Jeffard seemed to have been injured—perhaps by a chance shot—as he limped, and was no match for his pursuer in a foot-race.

"Stop, or I will shoot you!" shouted Lawson; but the fugitive did not stop.

Ben fired, but without wishing to hit, and the only effect was to make Jeffard run the faster.

His pursuer followed him at a lope, until he saw him halt on the bank of the stream, near where it emptied into the Penobscot.

Only a second he halted—then he jumped off the bank and disappeared.

Directly Lawson stood on the spot from which the fugitive had leaped into the stream, and looked in the water for him, expecting to see him swimming toward the other side.

But he was not visible anywhere.

Neptune, who had followed his chief from the house, joined him there, and they searched the water and the bank of the stream up and down, without finding any trace of Jeffard.

"He must have drowned," said Lawson sorrowfully. "If so, his body has been carried out into the Penobscot, and we will never see it."

Returning to the house, they found the Staley family clearing up the premises, repairing damages, and taking an inventory of the results of the combat.

It had, indeed, been short, sharp, and sanguinary.

Tom Staley was severely wounded, his father had an ugly hole in his left arm, Neptune showed the scratch of a bullet, and there were several scalds among them to show the effect of Mrs. Staley's hot water warfare.

One of the Kanucks was dead there, and another was so badly wounded that he could not be expected to live long.

"I never saw or heard of anythin' like this afore," said the landlord. "I thought we could live peaceable up here in the woods, with nothin' to bother us but the bears and wolves; but it seems that there's two-legged beasts of prey, as well as four-legged ones."

The dead man was covered up in a corner, to be buried in the morning, and his wounded comrade was as well cared for as if he had been a friend, though it was evident that he was booked for another world.

The rest of the night was passed in attending to Tom Staley and removing the unsightly traces of the disturbance.

While they were thus employed Mrs. Staley raised an alarm of fire.

She had discovered smoke and flame at a corner of a shed that was used for storing hay and corn.

All who were able to, rushed out there, armed with their rifles, as well as with pails of water.

They did not need to use the rifles, as there was no enemy in sight, but found the corner of the shed burning briskly, the fire having evidently been started by an incendiary.

By sharp and vigorous work they succeeded in extinguishing the flames before any serious damage had been done.

"That looks to me," remarked Ben Lawson, "like a piece of spite work on the part of Joe Jeffard. I begin to believe that he was not drowned, and that I may get hold of him yet."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MARY PAYSON'S MISFORTUNES.

MARY PAYSON had anything but an easy and pleasant time in Cranston after the departure of her lover and her persecutor.

Agnes Muldrow, who had formerly been passably gentle and peaceably inclined, though she had mean and annoying ways, was quite a different woman when Julius had gone up into the pine woods.

Her redeeming quality was that she was intensely devoted to her brother—as women are often devoted to those who are utterly undeserving of their devotion.

She worried and fretted about him continually, declaring that she was sure that some terrible accident would happen to him, and that he was certain to perish up there in the wilderness.

If he should, and she knew he would, Mary would be the actual and direct cause of his death.

"If you had married him when he asked you to," she said to the girl, "or had promised to marry him, he would be here now, alive and out of danger. But you drove him away from Cranston, and have driven him to his death."

"I see no cause to blame myself," replied Mary. "I do not consider myself in the least degree responsible for your brother's actions, whatever they may be. I do not believe that he really cared for me at all, and I cannot imagine why he wanted to marry me."

"You might as well say that Julius is a liar. He told you that he loved you, and asked you to be his wife. Would he have wanted to marry you if he did not care for you? That is nonsense. You have broken his heart and driven him away from Cranston."

"From what I have seen of him, I would not have supposed that he had a heart."

"You are a wicked girl to say that. I know that he has a heart. He was always good to his sister."

"But better to himself, in my opinion," replied Mary, "than to anybody else. I have good reason to believe that he has never really cared for me. He must have had some reason for wishing to marry me that I cannot yet fathom; but I have no doubt that the truth will come out in time. He knew, also, that I was as good as engaged."

"As bad as engaged, you had better say. What sort of a man is it who has taken your fancy? An utterly unsettled man, here to-day, and gone to-morrow—who came back like a bad penny, only to disappear like a shadow."

"But I know where he is. He has gone away on a secret mission, just as your brother has, and neither of them was driven off by a broken heart. He will come back, and it is more than likely that he will bring news that will astonish somebody."

"Mary Payson, you are so sly and secretive that I do not know what to make of you. I suppose the trouble with you is that you are disappointed and angry because my aunt did not leave you all her property, according to your most unreasonable expectations. If you and your vagabond lover are plotting mischief against Julius and me, I can assure you that you will come to grief."

These bickering continued from day to day, and grew worse as Agnes Muldrow got no word

from her brother, who probably did not care to write to her, and was not in a position to send a letter if he had wished to.

It was a consolation to Mary Payson to feel that Julius was not there to persecute her; but his sister's accusations and innuendoes were making life at the old place insupportable to her.

At last the trouble came to a crisis.

Agnes Muldrow informed the girl that her presence there was no longer desirable—in fact, that her room would be preferable to her company.

"The truth is, Miss Payson," she said, severely, "that there are damaging reports in circulation about you. There is a suspicion in the village that you know more about the manner and cause of my aunt's death than you are willing to tell. You were so thick, as the people say, with Nick Sanders, her murderer, that there is ground for the suspicion. Some of my friends object to visiting here on that account, and they blame me for harboring you."

Mary's face was crimson with mortification and anger; but she kept her temper remarkably well.

"I don't know what you mean by speaking of harboring me, Miss Muldrow," said she. "I supposed that I had a right here. If I have not, I do not care to stay. As for the reports and suspicions you speak of, I know something about them. I know who originated them and are responsible for them. They were set afloat by your brother and that lawyer who acts as his tool, and you have done as much as anybody to spread them."

"You wicked girl! As if I could stop the tongues of the people who talk about you."

"You can set them going, though, Miss Muldrow, and then it is no wonder that you fail to try to stop them. The talk will not hurt me in the end, as the truth must come out. In the meantime I can stand it, and can keep a clearer conscience than those who strive to destroy my good name."

"What do you mean by the truth? and how is it to come out? I am convinced that you and that fellow Lawson are plotting against Julius and me, and the sooner you leave here the better I will be pleased."

"And so will I. You have for some time made it very unpleasant to me here, Miss Muldrow, and I will be glad to get away from your presence."

Mary Payson was not without a place of refuge.

She went direct from the house which she had believed was to be always her home to the cottage of Ben Lawson's widowed mother.

This, indeed, was the arrangement that Ben had made for her before he left Cranston, and she had promised him that she would seek a home with his mother when circumstances should require her to do so.

But she had wished to remain in the Jardine residence as long as was reasonably possible, in order to assert her right there.

Indeed, she preferred to be ordered away, and was glad when the matter took that shape.

As for the reports and suspicions that had been so carefully and widely circulated they had troubled her greatly, although she carried a stout heart in her breast, and tried to bear herself boldly before the world.

They were not open and definite charges or accusations, such as could be met and faced, but vague insinuations and innuendoes which could not be made to assume shape, and which were on that account the more provoking.

The conclusion to which they pointed was that she was the accomplice of a murderer, of the murderer of her benefactress, who had been a mother to her, and whom she had loved as a mother.

Their effect was to isolate her from the world in which she had moved.

Her former friends fell off from her, and some people shunned her, while others treated her coldly.

This was hard to bear, but she tried to bear it bravely, believing that her wrongs would yet be righted.

In taking up her residence with the widow Lawson she did not go there as a dependent, as she was well able to take care of herself; but Ben was to marry her when he returned from the pine woods, and in the mean time he desired that his home should be hers.

A very pleasant home it proved to be, as she was warmly welcomed by Mrs. Lawson, who was joyful in the belief that her son's marriage would cause him to settle down, no more to roam in far and wild regions.

The old lady was more than kind to her prospective daughter-in-law, and Mary was so pleasant and companionable, and withal so useful, that she was a great comfort to Ben's mother.

She had been there but a short time when she received a letter from Ben, which had been quite a while on the way, as it was written when he touched at Staley's tavern on his way into the woods.

Mary got a great deal of consolation from this letter, though it contained little matter of interest beyond the assurance of his enduring affection, of his continued health and safety,

and of his firm determination to do everything that he was able to do to clear up the mystery of Mrs. Jardine's murder and to set his darling girl right before the world in every particular.

He had learned, he said, that Julius Muldrow and his party had got into that region ahead of him, and he had reason to believe that they were seeking Nick Sanders, and he was then on the point of going on to look them up.

There was something he had just seen, he went on to say, which induced him to believe that he had struck the trail which he wished to find; but he could not follow it up just then, as he was anxious to see the other party and learn what they had accomplished.

Mrs. Lawson enjoyed the letter with Mary, and they were reading it again and commenting upon it, when a visitor for the young lady was announced.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

MARY's visitor was ushered into the sitting-room which she and Mrs. Lawson were then occupying, the parlor or "best room" being, according to the old New England style, so tightly closed that it might as well have been hermetically sealed.

He proved to be a dignified and fine-looking elderly gentleman, who introduced himself as "Leander Meacham, commonly known as Judge Meacham."

Mary Payson had heard of him, and expressed herself as being highly honored by his visit.

"Of course you wonder what has brought me here," said he. "It is no harm, I assure you. I wish to speak with you, Miss Payson, of some matters—I may call them business matters—in which you are interested. I have just returned from the pine woods, far up the Penobscot."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mary. "We have just received a letter from that region—from a friend of mine, this lady's son, Ben Lawson."

"I have not met him, Miss Payson, but have heard of him. Though we are few and scattered in that country, we generally manage to hear of each other. I met another acquaintance of yours."

"Julius Muldrow?"

"Not that man, though I heard of him, too. Before I tell you anything more I had better introduce myself a little further. Being an inquisitive old fellow, I have been asking some questions since I reached Cranston, and I believe that I am a relative of yours. Was not your mother's maiden name Burwell?"

"Yes, sir."

"Jane Burwell—I thought so. She was my half-sister. I lost sight of her after she quit Augusta and married against her father's will, and did not know that she had left a child. But circumstances have caused me to discover you, and now you are to understand that I am your uncle Leander, and that I have a right to take an interest in your affairs."

Mary was very glad to learn of this relationship, as she was more than favorably impressed by the old gentleman.

"Through my inquisitiveness," he continued, "I have learned much of your history, and there are some matters which I may help you to straighten out, if you will allow me to try."

"I will be only too thankful," she answered. "I need help, and such help as Judge Meacham can give is more than I could ever have hoped for."

"Well, then, the person I spoke of having met up there was Nick Sanders, who is accused of being the murderer of Mrs. Jardine. He assured me that he was innocent, and I am inclined to believe that he spoke the truth. What do you think about it?"

"That is my belief."

"Have you any evidence to sustain it?"

"None at all. They fastened the crime upon him, and all the circumstances were against him and he ran away."

"Yes; that gives the case a bad look. Still I doubt his guilt. I can see no sufficient motive, and it occurs to me that there may have been a motive elsewhere. It may be hard to show his innocence; but I mean to look into this matter, and the chapter of accidents may bring forward some strange developments."

"How did you find him?" inquired Mary.

"I will tell you. It is a long story, but you must hear it all."

Judge Meacham related his adventure with the hurricane on the shore of the lake, telling of the death of his guide, the arrival of Abner Sanders, his visit to the home of the Sanders family, and his final return to civilization.

"As soon as I got back down the river," he continued, "I saw the mother of poor Steve Hollis, told her the sad news, and did what I could to console her and make her comfortable."

"Then I came on to Cranston to look into the Nick Sanders affair, and here I found you."

"Now, my dear, as that murder is necessarily connected with some matters that intimately concern you, I want you to tell me all about yourself, and particularly about your relations with Mrs. Jardine up to the time of her death."

Mary willingly told all her story faithfully and fully, omitting no detail that she could think of, and assisted in her narration by the hints and questions of the old lawyer.

"I think I understand it quite clearly now," said he. "So you believed, and had reason to believe, that Mrs. Jardine intended to leave her property to you. It is strange that she made no will."

"I am quite sure that she did make a will," replied Mary. "It was drawn by Mr. Wilson, a lawyer of this village, who has since moved to Augusta. It was signed and witnessed, too."

"Of course she is supposed to have destroyed that will. I must speak to Wilson about it. Well, my dear, I have got that down, and now we will pass to another matter. You say that after Mrs. Jardine's death Julius Muldrow pressed his attentions upon you and wanted to marry you. Had he ever shown any symptoms of that kind during her lifetime?"

"Never. He had scarcely treated me even with common politeness."

"So you were forced to the conclusion that he did not really care for you, and had some motive other than love for wishing to marry you. It is a natural conclusion, and I will make a note of it. As for the reports about you—of course you know that there are reports about you."

"Yes, sir," she answered, with a blush.

"As for those reports, if we can show the innocence of Nick Sanders, they will be silenced at once, as you could not be the accomplice of a man who was not guilty. In the mean time I may do something, with your permission, to stop that sort of talk. Now I must go."

Mrs. Lawson and Mary pressed the gentleman to take supper there, and to stay all night.

"I shall be obliged to deny myself that pleasure," he replied. "I have very little time to spare, and must make use of every minute. I leave Cranston in the morning, and shall get back into the woods as soon as possible. But I will call here before I go, and, if you have a letter which you want to send up the river, I will be glad to take it for you."

When the judge left the widow Lawson's cottage he left two pleased and grateful hearts behind him.

That night Judge Meacham called on Nathan Allyn at his house.

The lawyer felt himself highly honored by a visit from the legal luminary, whom he received in his parlor and treated with the most distinguished consideration.

Perhaps the call might mean political promotion for him, or employment in some important and profitable litigation.

"My visit, Mr. Allyn," said the judge, "is entirely one of business, and, as I am short of time, I trust that you will pardon me if I lay the business before you as briefly as possible."

Surely it must be legal business, in which the village lawyer would be honorably associated with the Augusta magnate.

"State it as concisely as you please, judge. I shall be happy to afford you any assistance in my power."

"It is a matter that I feel a certain delicacy in mentioning, though I have no doubt that you will at once see the propriety of complying with a hint which I am about to give you. I learn that some damaging reports have been circulated concerning a young lady of this village, Miss Mary Payson, in connection with the murder of Mrs. Jardine. I am also informed that you have assisted in spreading those reports, if you did not originate them."

Anything of this kind was the last thing Nathan Allyn would have expected to hear, and he was dumfounded.

"I don't say that you did," continued the judge, "and I doubt if the origination of the reports could be proved to the satisfaction of a jury. But the repetition of them is equally actionable, and I have been instructed to bring suits for slander. I do not wish any business of that sort, and I hope that I may be able to amicably arrange the difficulty by suggesting that you, as a prominent and influential citizen of Cranston, can do much to prevent the circulation of the reports in question if you are willing to. You will thus do justice to a worthy young lady, and will avoid the possibility of legal complications."

Nathan Allyn knew well that under his velvet words Judge Meacham had a sharp legal claw concealed, and he accepted the situation at once, climbing down as gracefully as he could.

"I have heard of the reports you mention," said he, "and I may possibly have spoken of them; but I am naturally very cautious as to what I say. However, as you suggest, if the reports are unjust, I may be able to do something to stop them, and I shall take pleasure in doing so, as the young lady is a friend of yours. Anything to oblige a brother lawyer, and especially so distinguished a member of the profession."

This was sufficient, and Judge Meacham ended his visit, leaving the lawyer quite crestfallen.

The next day Agnes Muldrow received a letter, similar in purport to the warning that had been given to the lawyer, but couched in the politest terms possible.

After an interview with Nathan Allyn she deemed it advisable to pay strict attention to the admonition of the letter.

In the morning, after calling at the widow Lawson's cottage and getting a letter for her son, Judge Meacham left Cranston.

CHAPTER XXIX.

INTO THE DEPTHS.

WHEN Hemlock Hank went downward with the log which Julius Muldrow had tilted over the edge of the cliff, he could not doubt that he was going to certain and sudden death.

Yet he kept his head clear and his nerves tense, ready to take advantage of any chance for safety that might offer, though it seemed to be impossible that such a chance would present itself.

As he straddled the end of the log, gazing down into the basin, he had noticed below him a large fir tree, growing out from the face of the rock.

There could be nothing better than a fir tree, with its broad branches and abundant leafage, to receive the weight of a falling man.

If he could manage to drop into the fir, it would at least break his fall, and perhaps he might catch a bough and save himself.

These thoughts of course passed through his brain with the quickness of lightning, and his action was correspondingly quick.

As the log tipped over, slowly at first, he slipped from it, striving to throw himself in the direction of the fir tree.

In this endeavor his success was better than he could have hoped for.

He fell like lead, and the rapidity of the descent took his breath away; but he had sense enough to know that he was out of the line of the log, whose withered branches scarcely grazed him as it went down.

He landed in the top of the fir tree, instinctively throwing out his arms, and grasping blindly at everything that was within his reach.

The log went tumbling through the branches at his side, bending and breaking them, and then bumping and crashing as it struck the rocks below.

But he was safe, at least for the time.

He caught one of the spreading branches of the fir, and clung to it as if with a death grip.

Though he was insensible, or nearly so, when he struck the tree, his clutch was sure and tenacious.

While he held to the branch his body was largely supported by the boughs below it, so that no great muscular exertion was required to keep him there.

Soon his senses came back to him, and he placed himself in a safer and easier position, where he calmly considered the situation.

It was but a scanty view that he could get through the thick fir branches of what was below him; but he realized the fact that he was still at a considerable distance from the bottom of the basin.

He perceived that he was all there and comparatively unhurt—not a limb lost, and no injuries sustained, with the exception of a few bruises.

He was therefore equal to his further salvation, if it was in the power of human skill and muscle to accomplish it, and it remained to be seen what his chances were.

Climbing down the tree to its base, he perceived that it grew out of a cleft in the rock, and that there was sufficient standing room about its roots to enable him to make a calm survey of the situation.

Looking upward at first, and then downward, he discovered that he was already more than half-way to the bottom of the basin, and that the remainder of the descent, though difficult, was not impossible.

There were projections of rock below him, with stunted trees and bushes, by the aid of which he hoped to be able to get down without serious danger to life and limb.

He was about to begin the descent when he was greeted by a hail from below.

It was not to be supposed that the Sanders family would remain ignorant of what was going on at the side of the cliff, so near to their habitation.

If they had not previously seen anything unusual in that direction, the crash of the falling log would have been sufficient to call their attention to the spot.

But they had seen something, and it was the sharp sight of Abner that discovered it.

He had caught a glimpse of a movement of some sort at the edge of the cliff, and had watched the place closely to ascertain what the movement meant.

When he saw a man crawling out toward the edge of the log that overhung the cliff, he hastened to point out the object to his father.

Dave and Nick Sanders were then at work on the dam at the foot of the pond.

"It is a man, sure enough," said Ike Sanders. "Who can he be, and what is he there for? Shouldn't wonder, Abner, if he is one of those darned Kanucks who bothered us a while ago."

"Don't believe it, dad," replied the sharp-sighted lad. "He don't look to me like a Kanuck. I'd bet my rifle that he is a white man."

When Abner offered to bet his rifle, it was understood that he was absolutely certain of the statement he made.

He stepped aside with his father to a position from which they could watch the strange proceedings above, without being observed.

"It's a dangerous scheme that he is trying to work," remarked Ike Sanders. "Darned if I should like to be in his place. That is an old tree trunk that he is straddling, I suppose. It is to be hoped that t'other end is well anchored. If it ain't—"

"Oh, dad!" quickly interrupted Abner. "It moves! It tips over! It is goin' to fall!"

Ike Sanders then plainly saw the log start downward, and saw the man look back before he took his plunge into space.

The author of the calamity, at the other end of the tree, was not within the range of their vision.

"Merciful heaven!" exclaimed Ike. "He will be smashed to flinders! Oh, Abner, this is awful!"

They watched the log and the man as they started together, and directly the former came bounding and crashing over and against the rocks, until it rested, in a damaged condition, at the foot of the cliff.

It was evident that the man did not accompany it the entire distance, and what had become of him?

This question was answered by Abner, who pointed to the fir tree in which Hank Ward had lodged, and which was still shaking under his fall.

"Perhaps he ain't dead," suggested Ike Sanders. "We had better try to get up there and see if we can help him."

Before they could get to the foot of the cliff they saw the man reach the base of the fir tree, and directly he started to finish the descent which he had begun so hastily and against his will.

"Hold on, there!" screamed Abner, in his shrill and reaching voice that could be heard so far and so plainly.

"Don't try it there! Go furdur to the right, an' you'll find a better way."

Abner spoke as one who knew what he was talking about, and if there was anybody who was thoroughly acquainted with every portion, accessible and inaccessible, of the basin and its surroundings, it was he.

Hemlock Hank was grateful for the information, of whose value he was soon made aware.

It may be supposed that he was not very well pleased with the idea of going down among those who, under the circumstances, might be considered as his enemies; but he could not ascend the cliff, and, as he must do something, there was nothing for it but to descend.

He took the direction recommended to him by Abner, and found a way of descent which was not very difficult to so agile and athletic a man as he.

With the aid of bushes and trees and points of rock he worked his way down to the foot of the cliff safely and pretty rapidly.

Abner, as he closely watched the descent of the stranger, was struck by an idea, or by a memory.

"I guess I know who that is, dad," said he. "Yes, I'm sart'in. I've seen him afore. I met him once at the river, same time 's I fu'st saw that Dick Riden."

"Who is he, then?"

"Hank Ward—the man they call Hemlock Hank."

"Sho! You don't say. I'll be darned glad to see him; but I wonder how he ever got into this scrape."

CHAPTER XXX.

A CLEAN BREAST OF IT.

THE question which Ike Sanders suggested was one which he was sure to ask Hemlock Hank as soon as it should be possible to do so, and one which that individual did not anticipate much pleasure in answering.

But it would have to be answered, and, as his nature was entirely honest and straightforward, there would be nothing for him but to tell the plain and simple truth.

Ike Sanders advanced to meet him with a smiling face and open hands.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Ward," said he. "Mighty glad to see you here. But I'd rather you'd ha' come in a leetle easier an' not quite so sudden."

"I am very thankful," answered Hank, "that I am here with a whole skin and no broken bones."

"So are we, Mr. Ward. We'd be awful sorry to see such a man as you git hurt."

"You seem to have a leetle the advantage of me here," remarked Hank. "You know me; but I can't say that I ever come across you afore."

"It was my boy Abner, here, who gave me your name, and, of course, I know you by reppytation, as I may say. Abner has seen you afore, though I don't suppose you remember

anythin' about him. My name is Isaac Sanders, and I live here with my family winter and summer, year in an' year out."

"Glad to see you, Mr. Sanders—ever so glad. I guess you want to know how I happened to come in here so off-handed and sudden-like."

"No hurry, Mr. Ward—not a bit o' hurry. You must feel sorter shuck up and out o' shape arter that tumble. Come to the house, and I guess we can find a bit o' Medford rum there that ain't to be sneezed at. That'll straighten you up ag'in, and then you can tell the story when you feel like it."

At the house Hemlock Hank was made acquainted with Mrs. Sanders, and soon Dave came in and was introduced to him.

Abner, who had his suspicions of the stranger, had cautioned his cousin Nick to keep out of the way for the present.

"Abner and I saw you up there astraddle of that log, Mr. Ward," said Ike Sanders, who was itching to get at the secret of the tumble.

"We saw you up there, sorter distant-like, and I said to Abner that it was a resky thing to do; but I never thought that such a man as you would git such a tumble."

"It wasn't as resky as you might suppose, Mr. Sanders. I was safe enough there, if I'd been let alone. I had a man settin' on t'other end of the log."

"And what became o' him?"

"He let up on me. He dumped me over."

"Dumped you over? Thunder at Christmas! What did he do that for?"

"That's more'n I can tell you. I know he had a sort o' grudge ag'in me, but never supposed he would Kerry it so far as that. When it comes to killin' folks, you know, that's a serious business."

"Should say so. Who's the man?"

"Now I've got to tell you the whole string, and make a clean breast of it, as I may say. I came up here with a man named Dick Ridsen. I think your boy there met him a bit ago; didn't he?"

"Well, yes, I believe he did."

"And did him a good turn, too—more'n one. Dick will never forget that; no more will I. Another man came with us—a young man named Julius Muldrow. Mebbe some of you have heard o' him?"

"Mebbe so," curtly answered Ike Sanders.

"They came up here to look for a young feller named Nick Sanders, who is accused of a murder down at Cranston, and they brought me along as a guide. Now you've got me where you want me, I guess."

"Never mind that now," observed Ike. "Go on and tell us about the tumble."

Hemlock Hank proceeded to relate the adventures of himself and his party since they came into the woods, and told how they had arrived outside the Sanders stronghold, where they witnessed the discomfiture of the Kanucks, and administered chastisement to one of the vagabonds who had entrapped Terrapin Dick.

He went on to speak of their further ascent of the mountain and exploration of the plateau up there, with the object of trying to find a rear entrance to the basin.

He then mentioned the departure of Ridsen for the purpose of bringing up provisions, and described the arrangement he had made to get a better view from the edge of the cliff.

"We had been havin' a sight o' trouble with that young cuss," said he. "He was so onaccountably fractious an' mean an' hateful that there warn't no such thing as gittin' along with him in peace an' quiet. I had to give him a right sharp settin' down awhile ago, and I guess he kinder treasured that up ag'in me, waitin' till he could git a good chance to take the grudge out o' me. He got his chance at last, and then he boosted up his eend o' the log, and sent me whirlin'."

"And so," remarked Ike Sanders, "you came sneakin' round here to try to ketch Nick Sanders, and the Lord stepped in and upset the scheme."

"You may put it so if you want to," replied Hank; "but it seems to me that instead o' bein' the Lord who upset me, it was the devil in the shape of Julius Muldrow, who is sart'inly one of the devil's imps."

"It was the Lord's mercy that you wasn't killed, anyhow. Now, Mr. Ward, as you're alive and well, mebbe you'd like to j'ine your friends and carry out that scheme of ketchin' Nick and hangin' him."

"What do you want to talk that way for, Isaac?" demanded Mrs. Sanders, who had been favorably impressed by Hemlock Hank's honest countenance and manly bearing. "I'm sure that Mr. Ward don't look like a man who would want to do anybody any harm."

"You're right about that, ma'am," said Hank. "I may say, too, that I'm done with Julius Muldrow and his schemes, whatever they may be. Is it likely that I'd want to take up with a sneakin' scoundrel who tried to send me to such a death—a cowardly, cold-blooded murderer? If I should ever j'ine him ag'in, it would be to choke the wretched soul out o' his misable body. There's Dick Ridsen, too—if he knew what that scamp has done to me, he'd have a sudden and solid settlement with him."

"I'll bet my rifle, dad," said Abner, "that Mr. Ward won't bother Nick or any of us."

"But I guess, my son, that we'd better keep him here awhile."

"That's right enough," replied Hank. "I'm willin' to stay, and glad of the chance. I hope you won't lay up too much of a hard feelin' ag'in Dick Ridsen, who is one of the squarest an' best men livin'. It's jest part of his reg'lar business that he's 'tendin' to in this."

"I've heerd that there's folks who do that sort o' thing for pay," observed Ike. "I suppose he'll be for hangin' around here and watchin' a chance to grab Nick."

"I don't know what he will do now. Of course he will wonder what's become o' me, and Julius Muldrow will lie to him. If I should go out o' here, it would only be to let him know that I am safe, and to tell him the truth about that skunk from Cranston."

"Well, I guess we won't worry about him, as he ain't likely to get hold of Nick."

"If he should git hold of him, Mr. Sanders, I don't believe it would be the wuss for the young chap, because I know that Dick Ridsen has doubts about his bein' guilty, and would be more likely to do him good than harm."

"Well, Mr. Ward, Nick says that he ain't guilty, and that he never heerd of the murder until he came up here, and I believe him. Judge Meacham thinks that he ain't guilty, too."

The name of the distinguished lawyer at once made an impression upon Hemlock Hank.

"Judge Meacham?" he exclaimed. "How do you know what he thinks about it?"

"He was here awhile ago. He gave Abner the splendid rifle you see there."

The rifle was duly inspected and admired, and Nick Sanders, assured by Abner that there was no danger, was brought into the house and introduced to the stranger.

He told his story again, as he had previously told it to his own people.

"I guess you are right, Mr. Sanders," said Hank Ward, "in believin' that the young chap ain't guilty, and if Judge Meacham thinks so, too, it will do to bet on as a fact. But the most of what I've jest heerd ain't news to me. Dick Ridsen gave me about the same p'int, and had about the same ideas."

"What does he want to come up here huntin' Nick for, then?" demanded Ike Sanders.

"Can't say. He don't allus tell everythin' that's in his mind. Come to think, though, I shouldn't wonder if he wants to find him so's to fix the murder on the man who really did it."

"I would be glad enough to go with him," said Nick. "Since I heerd that Miss Mary was talked about as havin' put me up to killin' the old lady, I've wanted to go back and tell 'em what a set of liars they are. But Judge Meacham said that I had better stay here awhile."

"And here you shall stay, Nick," observed his uncle, "until Judge Meacham says it will be safe for you to go down there. Now I want to know what we are goin' to do with Mr. Hank Ward. I don't like the idee of tyin' him up, or shuttin' him up."

"'Twouldn't do no good," replied Hank. "I have got out of a wuss scrape than this when folks wanted to keep me. I guess you had better take my word for it that I won't leave this hole in the hills without givin' you notice."

"I believe you, old man. Your word is good enough for me."

CHAPTER XXXI.

GRIEF AND SUSPICION.

It was not immediately after Julius Muldrow had done his dastardly deed that he began to realize the extent and enormity of the crime he had committed.

For awhile he acted as if he was dazed, sitting on the ground near the place where the log had been, and staring vacantly into space.

Then he got up and ran about like a crazy man, frantically calling the name of the man he had sent into the abyss.

After awhile he calmed down, crawled to the edge of the cliff, and looked over into the basin.

But he saw nothing there that he might have hoped or feared to see.

Hemlock Hank had then climbed down the fir tree, and was finishing the descent of the cliff.

During his further progress he was concealed from the view of Muldrow by trees and other obstructions.

Besides, the would-be murderer, in addition to his other defects, had the infirmity of shortsightedness.

Gradually Julius regained complete control of his senses, and the full realization of what he had done came to him.

Doubtless he would have given worlds, in imagination, to undo the fatal deed; but it was done and over with, and after it remained the savor of a satisfied grudge.

He could not doubt that Hemlock Hank was dead, very dead, as it was impossible that he should have survived that fearful fall, and it would be necessary to give a plausible account of his disappearance to Ridsen on his return.

That, in the opinion of Julius, would be easy enough to do.

But he became very restless and uneasy when

he found himself alone, and especially when he reflected on the manner in which he came to be alone.

He was continually looking about, and now and then starting, as if he feared the approach of something that might harm him.

As the thief is said to fear in each bush an officer, so he saw a possible enemy in every motion of a branch or shadow of a cloud.

Finally he seated himself near the edge of the cliff, facing from it, with his own rifle and Hemlock Hank's at his side, both cocked and within reach.

Never before had he felt such a dread of being alone.

He remembered well his unpleasant experience with the bear that treed him; but it was something more than dread of a possible bear that now depressed his spirits and made him long for company.

When Terrapin Dick finally made his appearance, he seemed to come so suddenly and so like a specter, that Julius started up in affright, his face pale and his limbs trembling.

"What's the matter with you, Mr. Muldrow?" demanded the detective, as he transferred his load from his back to the ground."

"Matter? What matter?"

"Are you crazy? You look and act so strangely, that I want to know what is the matter with you."

"You came up so suddenly and silently, that you startled me."

"That is queer. I thought I was making plenty of noise. Where is Hank Ward?"

"I am afraid, Mr. Ridsen, that he is dead."

It was then Terrapin Dick's turn to be startled, and it must be admitted that there was good cause for his agitation.

"Dead?" he exclaimed. "Hemlock Hank dead? It is impossible, I can't believe it. Is this one of the pleasant little games that you are so fond of playing?"

"It is no sort of a game," answered Julius, almost sobbing as he spoke. "I wish to God it was. He must be dead. He can't be alive. That is what has broken me all up, Mr. Ridsen. My nerves are in a terrible state."

Terrapin Dick sat down on the ground, and covered his face with his hands.

His form was shaken with emotion, and his attitude spoke of extreme depression.

But there were traces of tears on his face when he arose.

"This is a fearful blow to me," he said, "and yet I am sure that I don't fully realize it. I can't get hold of the idea that Hemlock Hank is dead—that such a man—such a good man—should have been taken away. But I know nothing about it yet. Tell me what has happened, Mr. Muldrow, and just how it happened. I want you to be exact about it."

Julius told the story in his own way, as he had arranged it in his mind while he was awaiting the return of Ridsen.

According to his statement Hemlock Hank had insisted, against his advice, upon going out on the dead tree to get a better view of the valley.

When he had got a little distance from the edge of the cliff, Julius begged him not to go any further; but his entreaties were sneered at and derided.

Fearing that the guide would go too far and destroy the balance of the log, the young man seated himself near the butt end, with the object of anchoring it.

It seemed that Hemlock Hank, perceiving him there, was encouraged to greater recklessness, and crawled out further.

Suddenly the log tilted, the little end dropping down and the big end flying up, and the damage was done.

All was over in a moment.

The springing upward of the dead tree threw Julius off, and when he regained his feet the catastrophe was beyond his control.

The log was then swiftly slipping over the edge of the cliff, and directly it went down into the depths, carrying Hemlock Hank to his death.

Julius Muldrow told this story glibly enough, but in a jerky, irresolute manner, such as was calculated to breed suspicion.

It was a plausible tale—in fact, it did not lack much of being true—and the absence of the dead tree went far to confirm it; but Terrapin Dick had his doubts.

"That is strange," said he, "remarkably strange. Hank Ward was never rash or reckless. A more cautious man I never met. He would not have ventured out on that log unless he had good reason to believe that the other end was secure."

As the detective spoke he looked keenly at Muldrow, who made no attempt to meet his gaze.

But there was nothing strange in that, as Julius seldom looked anybody in the face.

"You will not have him to quarrel with any more," remarked Ridsen. "Whatever grudge you may have had against him is satisfied now."

"What do you mean?" demanded Julius, as he started up. "I hope you don't suspect me of having been the cause of his death."

"Oh, no—though the circumstances were so

peculiar, and I am in the habit of suspecting everything and everybody. I will say this, though, Mr. Muldrow—if it should ever turn out that you had anything to do with the death of that man, God help you!”

The detective walked to the edge of the cliff, and looked over there long and earnestly.

Apparently he saw nothing there that inspired him with any hope, as he was sad and dejected when he turned away.

“This is a terrible blow,” said he. “It seems to me that I was never hit so hard before. I shall not have any heart after this for the enterprise that brought us here. Besides, I am afraid that I can do nothing without my friend Ward. I had depended on him more than I relied on myself. It looks as if there is nothing to do now but to quit and go home.”

“That’s it!” eagerly exclaimed Julius. “Let us go home. That will suit me exactly.”

The detective looked at him curiously.

“That is queer again,” said he. “I had not supposed that you would be so ready to give up the business. You originated it, had taken a great interest in it, and have spent considerable money on it. I would not have thought that you would be willing to go home without securing the man we care for.”

“But I am tired of it now, Mr. Ridsen. I have had enough of it. I have seen all I care to see of this life in the woods, and the weather would soon drive us away. I am not as anxious as I was to catch that man. I am in no way bound to do it. I doubt if it is a matter that I ought to meddle with, anyhow. And now that poor Hank Ward is dead, I feel as if I would be glad to get away from here.”

“So it seems,” coldly replied Ridsen. “Reasons are as plenty as blackberries with you just now. Well, we will go.”

The young man’s face brightened.

But his spirits fell at the next words of the detective.

“Not just yet, though. Perhaps not for a week or so. We have plenty of time before cold weather sets in, and I must not forget my duty. I don’t like to give up anything that I have undertaken to do, and own myself beaten. The demands of justice must be attended to. If you have no longer any interest in the capture of that man, the law has, and I hold a warrant for his arrest. I must at least make an effort to secure him. Then, again, there is Hank Ward.”

“What of him?” excitedly asked Julius.

“He is dead, of course, as he could not have survived that fearful fall. But he was my friend, and I must see that he is properly buried. It is likely that the people down yonder have attended to that; but I must make sure of it, and must mark his last resting-place.”

Julius Muldrow would gladly have persuaded the detective out of his intention of remaining there; but he had learned that Terrapin Dick was as firm as a rock in his purposes, and there was reason to believe that by too much persistence he might strengthen the suspicions that already existed concerning himself.

So he quietly acquiesced in Ridsen’s determination, hoping that their further stay in the woods might be short.

The camp on the plateau was dreary and disconsolate after that.

To Ridsen the place was sad and lonely without his friend, and to Muldrow the very air was full of horror.

They ate their evening meal in silence, without any appearance of companionship, and at night lay down to rest separately, one on each side of the fire they had built.

During the night Muldrow was very restless, apparently tormented by bad dreams, starting, groaning, and muttering in his sleep.

More than once the detective crept to where he lay, and listened earnestly, as if hoping to extract some meaning from his half-uttered words and ejaculations.

He was excited by what he heard, though there was nothing that conveyed to him any clear and definite idea.

“If I was sure that this wolf helped Hank Ward to his death,” said he, “I would hang him to one of these trees.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

TERRAPIN DICK’S DISCOVERIES.

THE next day Terrapin Dick left the plateau, and descended the mountain.

He positively refused to allow Julius Muldrow to accompany him, greatly to the disgust of that young man, who was actually afraid of being left alone.

But Dick Ridsen’s word was law when he chose to make it so, and his companion who was not a comrade had no choice but to submit.

The purpose of the detective in this expedition was not clearly defined, and his course was to be determined by circumstances.

His vague idea, as he mentioned it to Julius at the time of his departure, was to scout around and see what was to be seen, in the hope that something would occur to further the object of his mission into the wild woods.

In the absence of Hank Ward he believed that he had better do his scouting alone.

He found no little difficulty in descending the mountain, as he did not strike the right “chute” at first, and several times got into positions from which he was obliged to retreat and take a fresh start.

These obstacles and false moves caused him to lose considerable time, and, not being a thoroughly expert woodsman, he lost his way in the intricacies of the mountain.

When he finally reached the level of the stronghold of the Sanders family, and was able to take his bearings and “place” himself, the day was so far advanced that he would not have more than time enough to get back to camp by nightfall.

So he had to choose between returning and spending the night there.

For himself he would have preferred the latter alternative; but, out of consideration for the feelings and fears of Julius Muldrow, though he knew that that individual was deserving of no such consideration, he decided on returning to the camp.

As he climbed up the mountain-side again, he found a much easier way of ascent than he had yet discovered, and derived no little consolation from the find.

It was the bed of a mountain stream, or torrent, then nearly dry, by following which he had a direct and comparatively easy route to his destination.

This discovery pleased him so well that he determined to try another scout the next day.

By starting early and descending the mountain without loss of time, he would have a good opportunity to make investigations below.

He gave Julius Muldrow no satisfaction concerning his operations that day, and stubbornly refused to allow the young man to accompany him when he set out the next morning.

He left the camp at an early hour, and easily descended the mountain by following the bed of the nearly dry stream, reaching his destination at an hour that gave him hopes of accomplishing something.

He shaped his course directly for the gap that formed the entrance to the Sanders territory, and found it without difficulty, as he was then pretty well acquainted with that vicinity.

His object was not yet by any means clearly defined, and it may be said that he trusted mainly to the chapter of accidents.

He hoped to discover something or to find somebody.

It was possible that he might find some member of the Sanders family—perhaps Nick himself—loitering about there, in which event there would be a chance to make a capture.

He saw no person, nor any sign of any person, except the plain trail which had long since been worn, and he resolved to push his investigations further.

Cautiously entering the pass, he ascended it as cautiously, until he came to a new and unexpected obstruction.

This was a combination of fence and *cheval-de-frise*, which stretched across the pass at its narrowest point, near the head.

It was composed of pointed logs and saplings, and had recently been placed there.

Ridsen examined this fortification carefully, perceiving that there was no chance to get through it or over it, except by the aid of an ax or of something that might serve as a ladder.

But he observed at the middle of the obstruction what he judged was intended to serve as a gate, though it seemed to be stoutly barred on the inside.

He tried it by pushing, without effect, and then he tried it by pulling.

The result was surprising.

A loud explosion followed his first vigorous pull, evidently from some firearm close at hand that had been heavily loaded.

Ridsen could not doubt that this was intended as a sort of backwoods burglar alarm, to give the people inside notice of any attempt to get through their fortification.

Indeed, he heard voices within, as if the Sanders family had been aroused, and thought that he ought to lose no time in taking himself away from there.

He was not afraid of getting hurt, but was unwilling to expose himself, or to let his presence there be known, when there was no chance of any better result than to put on their guard the people whom he was seeking.

Therefore he retreated in good order, but in pretty much of a hurry.

As he climbed the mountain again it seemed to him that the enterprise he had undertaken must end in failure.

There was no chance of success in sight, either near or remote.

The Sanders family held a very strong position, and had fortified it so that it was impregnable.

If he could not see his way clear to accomplish his purpose while he had Hemlock Hank to help him, what could he hope to do in the absence of that useful ally?

Surely he could do nothing alone against such overpowering odds.

To abandon the undertaking and go home appeared to be the best course for him then, as well as the easiest.

He had never before confessed to a failure, but

was obliged to admit that in this matter he was not altogether unwilling to accept defeat.

He reached the camp on the plateau by nightfall, and told Julius Muldrow of his discoveries, adding that he saw no further use in attempting to secure the person of Nick Sanders.

“Then I suppose we will get out of these lonesome woods and go home,” said Julius.

“Yes—there seems to be nothing else for us to do.”

This intelligence was highly gratifying to the young man, who brightened up immediately, and was unusually cheerful and good-humored during the remainder of the evening.

He also enjoyed a sound and unbroken night’s rest, doubtless dreaming of scenes that might banish the memory of Hank Ward’s terrible fate.

But something occurred the next day that put a different face on affairs, making an entire change in Terrapin Dick’s feelings and plans.

In the morning he went to take a last look down into the basin where his old friend had taken that fearful plunge.

He had kept away from there since he was told of Hemlock Hank’s death, as the place was hateful to him, but felt that a last look was due to the memory of his friend.

Julius Muldrow was elsewhere on the plateau with his rifle, looking for game, but at a little distance only, as he did not dare to go far from the camp.

As the detective sat at the edge of the cliff, and gazed down into the depths, he saw men walking about near the Sanders habitation, and among them was a tall figure that seemed familiar to him, even at that distance.

A thrill ran through his frame as he drew from his pocket the small but powerful field-glass which he always carried, and brought it to bear on the scene below.

Hastily adjusting the lenses, the figures of the men came out before him so plainly that he could almost distinguish the lineaments of their countenances.

A cry of joy and exultation escaped him as he recognized the face and form of Hemlock Hank.

His friend was alive and well.

The fall had not killed him, and he was safe and friendly down there with the people whom he had been hunting.

It seemed for the moment as if the discovery would drive the detective wild; but he controlled himself, as it would be necessary to display no emotion before Julius, whom he did not wish to be made aware of the fact that Hemlock Hank was alive.

He carefully looked through the glass again, to be sure that he had made no mistake, and thoroughly satisfied himself on that point.

Then he went back and called Julius, whom he informed of his intention to descend the mountain again.

“What’s that for?” angrily demanded the young man. “It was settled last night that we were to leave here and go home.”

“So we are, but not just yet. I got hold of an idea this morning, and there may be something in it. It will be easy to find out what it is worth, and I must make one more effort.”

“But the morning is already half gone, and you can’t get back here before night.”

“I think I can. You may look for me—perhaps a little later than usual.”

“The clouds are rising, Mr. Ridsen, and they have a threatening look. I am sure that a storm is coming.”

“Oh, if we allow the weather to stop us, we will never do anything in this world.”

Muldrow looked suspiciously at the detective.

There was something in Ridsen’s face and manner—something that he was not able entirely to conceal—as well as in his sudden eagerness to get down the mountain again, that surely meant something, and Julius was anxious to know what it meant.

“What is the matter with you, Mr. Ridsen?” he asked. “It seems to me that you have changed greatly since last night. Has anything happened? What is the new idea that you speak of?”

“I will tell you all about it when I come back. Perhaps it may amount to nothing, and I don’t want to excite any expectations that may never be realized.”

“Let me go with you, then.”

“No, Mr. Muldrow. You are a poor hand at knocking about in the woods and mountains, and I can’t be bothered with you.”

So Terrapin Dick left the camp on the plateau again, and left his uncongenial companion full of wonder and suspicion.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HONEY IS AVENGED.

HEMLOCK HANK had an easy and pleasant time during his sojourn in the basin with the Sanders family.

He was a man whose straightforward and open manner, and kindly and honest disposition, made friends for him wherever he went, and among all sorts and conditions of people.

Consequently it was natural that Ike Sanders and his folks, isolated as they were, and often feeling the need of other society than their own,

would take such a liking to him as would make them loth to part with him.

Mrs. Sanders, especially, "cottoned" to him at once, and exerted herself to please him in every particular, notably by cooking in her best style everything that could possibly be provided for the table.

She prevailed upon Dave and Abner to go outside and bring home loads of luscious trout, and just then the pond, which had been dammed up again, was the haunt of numerous wild ducks and geese, easy to kill, and delicious when cooked.

Hemlock Hank rested and feasted, and vowed that if that sort of thing should be kept up he would become too fat to go out through the gap.

"Tell ye what, Hank Ward," said Ike Sanders, "it wouldn't be safe for you if I should die, 'cause the widder would go for you quick as a wink, and you couldn't help bein' gobbled up."

"If she would agree to feed me allus in this sort o' style," replied Hank, "she might have me an' welcome."

"All the same, Isaac," remarked the dame, "I hope you will hang around on this 'arth as long as I do."

There was nothing to mar the good feeling of the Sanders family toward their guest, who could no longer be considered as a prisoner.

The hostile attitude which he had lately held toward them, if not forgotten, was passed over, and when reference was made to the pursuit of Nick, it was spoken of as something with which he had no connection.

All this would have been really enjoyable to Hemlock Hank, if it had not been for his thoughts of Dick Ridsen.

He knew that his friend and comrade, no matter what sort of a story Muldrow should tell, would grieve over his supposed death, and he was naturally anxious to inform Ridsen of his continued existence in this world.

But there was no chance to do so, as he had given his word that he would not leave the basin, and as he saw nobody up at the top of the cliff, though he frequently looked in that direction.

When they had finished the work of damming up the pond the Sanders family turned their attention to erecting a fortification at the narrowest part of the pass, for the purpose of keeping out enemies and intruders generally.

Hemlock Hank took an interest in this labor, and assisted his new friends with his hands as well as with his advice.

In the middle of the fence a sort of gate was left, which could be secured on the inside, and to this was attached an apparatus connecting with an old horse-pistol well loaded, which would be discharged if the structure were interfered with.

Shortly after the fortification was completed, and while the workmen were resting near the house, a loud report assured them that the alarm was in good working order.

They grabbed their guns, ran to the pass, and went out through the gate, but found no sign of any person about there.

"Mebbe it was a bear," suggested Ike.

They fastened the gate, reloaded the horse-pistol, and returned to the house, satisfied that they would be duly informed at any hour of any attempted invasion of their territory.

The next day had been fixed upon by Abner for an expedition to Staley's tavern on the Penobscot.

Judge Meacham had promised to send some cartridges to Staley's for Abner's rifle, and to write a letter to Ike Sanders concerning Nick.

Abner was of the opinion that it was time to look for the fulfillment of one or both of the judge's promises, and expected to find the cartridges and the letter at Staley's.

There was no objection to his making the journey alone, as he had often been there in the company of his father or Dave, and once had returned alone, though he had arrived at a very late hour on the last-named occasion, owing to a series of adventures with which Dick Ridsen was connected.

But he was not to make the trip alone this time.

Hemlock Hank, who was tired of being shut up in the basin, though he was so

remarkably well fed there, asked to be allowed to accompany the lad.

This request occasioned some discussion, Ike Sanders taking advantage of the opportunity to remind the guide that he was still a prisoner.

But Hank's promise to return with Abner was considered sufficient by the others, and Mrs. Sanders, to whom her deformed boy was very dear, was anxious that he should have so capable and trustworthy a companion as Hemlock Hank.

The guide borrowed Dave Sanders's rifle, and the fortification was opened for them and closed behind them, and the tall man and his short comrade set out merrily together.

It would be hard to say which of them enjoyed the trip the most.

Abner was always at his best and happiest when he was turned loose in the woods.

The idea of any sort of confinement, no matter how pleasant it might be made to him, was repugnant to Hank Ward, and he was as pleased as a schoolboy on his vacation at finding himself clear of the high walls of the hole in the hills.

Early in the journey he was surprised at the skill as a woodsman exhibited by his young companion.

Though much of Abner's life had been passed in the woods, and though he was thoroughly acquainted with the region in which he lived, it seemed to be by instinct, rather than by experience, that he took the most direct course possible toward his destination, and pursued it so unerringly.

Hemlock Hank, old hand as he was, was obliged to admit that in that respect the lad was decidedly his superior.

Before they had gone far Abner took his big comrade into his confidence with regard to a desire that lay near his heart.

It was the desire for revenge.

"Mebbe," said he, patting his fine rifle, "I may git a chance with this beauty to put a hole through one of those cussed Kanucks who killed Boney."

"Who was Boney?" inquired Hank.

"Boney was my bear," answered the lad, and he went on to tell what a pet the bear had been, how much he knew, what tricks he could perform, and how ruthlessly he had been slaughtered by the thieving vagabonds when they made the attack on the Sanders stronghold.

"Would you really kill any of them?" demanded Hank.

"Wouldn't I, though? Jest gimme a chance. Boney was wuth a hundred such skunks as them. He was a gentleman—never stole anythin', and allus minded me, and kep' watch for us at night. They tried to kill us, and did kill poor Boney. I said then that nothin' but blood would wash that out, and blood it'll be."

It was not long before Abner had his chance.

They were still at a considerable distance from Staley's, when he excitedly clutched his companion's arm.

"I smell a deer," said he. "Hold on here a minute, and see how quick I can fetch him."

Then he darted off into the woods at the right.

Hemlock Hank looked after him curiously, wondering what he meant by "smelling" a deer.

At the right of the course they were following, and not far from where Hank was standing, the forest terminated.

From the lay of the land it was evident that the ground suddenly fell away at that point, leaving a steep declivity at the bottom of which there must be a lake or river, or at least a stretch of wild meadow or bottom-land.

The guide followed Abner with his gaze until he disappeared in the bushes, expecting to catch a glimpse of the deer which the lad declared he had smelt.

He did not see any deer.

But he saw something else.

Just where the forest terminated, and doubtless at the edge of the declivity there, a man was standing, apparently looking down at the lowland.

It did not need a second glance to assure Hemlock Hank that the stranger was one of those vagabonds who had lately been infesting that region.

He knew at once what sort of a deer it was that Abner had smelt, and could not doubt that the boy was bent on vengeance for the slaughter of his pet bear.

He was about to step forward to put a stop to this wild scheme of justice, when he reflected that it would leave one rascal the less in the world, and that it was not worth his while to interfere.

It was just as well, as he would have been too late.

The report of the boy's rifle woke the echoes of the forest, and the Kanuck, throwing up his hands, fell forward and disappeared.

"That's one for Boney," said Abner, as the guide came to where he was standing.

He walked with Hank Ward to the edge of the declivity, where they looked over to see what had become of the Kanuck.

He was not visible there, his body having probably fallen among and been concealed by the bushes that covered thickly the steep slope.

But they saw something that surprised and interested them.

From the foot of the slope, perhaps a hundred feet below them, stretched a wide plain of bottom-land, covered with tall timber except where there were patches of swampy meadow.

Down there among the trees was a man whose actions were decidedly those of a lunatic.

He was racing around, in no particular direction, and with no object that could be understood, stopping every now and then to beat the air with his fists, and continually uttering the wildest and most hideous yells.

The greater part of his clothing had been torn off, and was scattered about upon the ground.

"Who is that man, and what in thunder is the matter with him?" demanded Abner.

"That is more'n I can tell you," answered Hank Ward. "He must be crazy, and I think he is a Kanuck, but ain't sure."

Directly there was something else to look at.

Three other men came out from the shadows of the big trees, and stealthily advanced toward the man of the strange antics.

"Come on, Abner!" eagerly exclaimed Hemlock Hank. "We must git down there."

He ran along the edge of the declivity until he found a place that seemed to offer a practicable descent, and he and the lad scrambled down as rapidly as they could.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE WRECK OF A CHIEF.

THE band of vagabonds, whose leader Joe Jeffard had become, were greatly depressed by the disastrous issue of their raid upon Staley's tavern.

They were sullen, too, and angry with their new chief.

He had spent some time at Staley's, was well acquainted with the house, its surroundings and its occupants, and had represented the tavern to them as being very easy of capture, and as containing plunder enough to satisfy their most extravagant desires.

With regard to the plunder, they had been unable to verify his statements, having failed to get sight of it.

His representations of the defenseless condition of the place had been decidedly negatived by the short and sharp struggle which had used up the band so badly.

They could not know, and probably did not guess, that the people at Staley's had been warned of the expected attack and were fully prepared to meet it.

It was natural, therefore, that they should suppose that their new leader had willfully deceived them, or that he was reckless and incompetent.

This feeling was increased by their remembrance of the fact that he had kept himself in the rear during the fight, and had not received a scratch.

It was further increased by Antoine Jannot, who took advantage of the disaster, by hints and innuendoes, to incense his comrades against Joe Jeffard.

That individual did not fail to take notice of this state of feeling, and perceived that he must do something to revive the waning confidence of his followers.

An opportunity soon presented itself.

On a private scouting expedition he learned that a boat loaded with supplies for advance parties of loggers was slowly coming up the Penobscot.

Among the supplies were several kegs of rum, and the men who propelled the craft were fond of rum, and prone to tap kegs.

Consequently their progress up-stream was uncertain, and by no means rapid.

It appeared to Jeffard that they offered an easy prey to his vagabonds, and he proposed to capture the boat and its cargo.

The Kanucks, having the memory of their late disaster fresh in their minds, were by no means anxious to be led by him into a fresh enterprise; but he finally induced them to follow him to the river, where they might judge for themselves of the chances of success.

The enterprise proved to be much easier and more profitable than any of them could have anticipated.

They went down to the river, where they easily found their prey, and watched the boat as it was laboriously poled against the current.

Then they watched the navigators as they landed and prepared to pass the night on shore.

With intense satisfaction they perceived that the boatmen paid close and unrelenting attention to a keg of rum, until they were so overcome by the liquor that they fell asleep without taking any pains to guard their camp.

It was not to be expected that they would give themselves any uneasiness on that account, as they could not suppose that they were in danger of being molested by anything but prowling beasts.

When they were in a sodden sleep Jeffard and his Kanucks stealthily and noiselessly surrounded them and pounced upon them.

The resistance of the Americans, in their drowsy and half-drunken condition, was easily overcome, and they were tied hand and foot.

Then their captors deprived them of their arms and ammunition, and took away as much of the cargo of the boat as they could carry, including the kegs of rum.

Before leaving the river they untied their victims, assuring them that any attempt to recover their property would result in their death.

For the saddened and weaponless boatmen there was nothing to do but to pole their craft up to Staley's, and tell the story of the robbery.

When the Kanucks returned to their camp they gave themselves up to feasting and high jinks generally.

Such a fine chance for having a jolly time they could not remember to have had before, and they expected to be thoroughly happy as long as the rum lasted.

If happiness consisted in alternating their time between getting drunk and sleeping off the effects of the liquor, they were indeed happy.

Joe Jeffard, as the leader of the party, claimed for his share of the spoils one entire keg of rum.

This greediness was objected to by the others; but, as there seemed to be an abundance of liquor, he was allowed to have his way without any strong opposition.

When Jeffard came into possession of this treasure he acted as if the one great object of his life had been achieved.

As a Yankee would say, he just froze to that keg of rum.

He devoted himself to it, to the exclusion of everything else.

During the day he was never separated from it, and at night he slept with it.

He abandoned the business of eating entirely, being content to live upon the liquor as long as it lasted.

Even his vagabond companions, brutal and besotted as they were, marveled at his appetite and capacity for drink, and were decidedly of the opinion among themselves that it must soon make an end of him.

The truth was that he had lain drunk a week or more at Staley's, and the capture at the river had given him a chance, of which he eagerly availed himself, to try another prolonged bout with his old adversary.

A more worthless man than he was at that time cannot be imagined.

He was simply, and without cessation, blind, stupid, wallowing drunk; and showed not the faintest desire to draw a sober breath.

Antoine Jaunot regarded the degradation and helplessness of his enemy with complete satisfaction, and busied himself in sowing the seeds of rebellion among his comrades, assuring them that they could not hope to prosper in their special style of industry unless they should cut loose from that drunken and worthless wretch.

His words had an effect, and the spectacle of the utter wreck of the chief had a greater effect.

When Jeffard got into the habit of acting strangely, and especially when he began to discharge his pistol wildly and without regard to their lives and limbs, they resolved that they would leave him and again trust their fortunes to the guidance of Jaunot.

Joe Jeffard, soggy with rum, was sound asleep when they quietly stole away from him, taking all the portable property in sight, including the arms and ammunition and the remainder of the rum.

Antoine Jaunot, after appointing a rendezvous at which he was to meet them, left the party, and went direct to Staley's tavern.

Jeffard awoke from his heavy slumber, feeling the need of liquor, and proceeded to satisfy his craving without delay.

His special keg was empty.

His companions, also, had departed.

The latter fact did not cause him any immediate uneasiness; but the lack of rum was an evil which he appreciated at once.

Gradually he connected one circumstance with the other, until it dawned upon his befogged intellect that his comrades had deserted him and left him stripped of everything but his clothing.

He got up and staggered around, looking for something that they might possibly have omitted to take, especially for rum, but finding nothing.

His oaths and blasphemies were frightful, and he kept them up until he was exhausted.

After a while there was a change of scene for him—a terrible change.

The forest was haunted.

It was not peopled by pleasant or shapely phantoms, but filled with imps, goblins, and other horrible apparitions, that pursued and hounded him wherever he went.

In vain he yelled for help, fought them off with frantic blows, and endeavored to escape them.

When he fancied that he was flying directly from them, he was only running around in a circle.

At last a long and frightful serpent, seemingly in a hundred coils, darted toward him through the air.

He saw it coming, but could not avoid it.

It caught him, its horrid coils tightened around him, pressing the breath out of his body, and he fell senseless upon the ground.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE CAPTURE OF JEFFARD.

BEN LAWSON's hope that Joe Jeffard had not been drowned, and that he might yet get hold of him, was destined to be realized.

Soon after the attack upon the tavern a boat from below arrived at Staley's, manned by three dispirited and disconsolate men, who had a sad story to tell.

In their camp at night, while they were sleeping soundly, dreaming of no danger, they had been attacked and surprised by a band of Kanucks, who had bound and plundered them.

After their assailants left them, they had pulled and poled their boat to Staley's as swiftly as possible, because they were terribly afflicted with thirst—a thirst which all the water in the Penobscot would not satisfy.

They proved the truth of that part of their story by quenching their thirst extensively at Staley's bar.

The greater part of their cargo had been left to them, as it was too heavy and cumbersome for the robbers to carry away; but they lamented the loss of their rum and all their weapons and ammunition.

From the description they gave of their assailants, though it was not as clear and definite as it might have been, Ben Lawson and Sam Staley were convinced that they were the same gang that had recently attacked the tavern.

Lawson, who saw an opportunity to secure the person of Joe Jeffard, if he should prove to be alive, assured the loggers that he knew who the robbers were and where they could be found.

If they wanted to recover the plunder and take vengeance on the scamps, he would be glad to lead them into the timber for that purpose.

His offer was thankfully accepted, and the boatmen proceeded to absorb a sufficient quantity of rum to fortify them against the fatigues of the expedition.

While they were thus engaged Neptune came in and informed his chief that Antoine Jaunot was lurking in the woods near by, doubtless with the desire of conveying some information.

Lawson hastened to find the Kanuck, and discovered that the information he had brought was of real importance at that juncture.

Joe Jeffard had not been drowned or in any way injured at the time of the attack on the tavern, but had led the remainder of his followers—among whom Jaunot did not count himself—to the capture of a supply boat on the river.

They brought back to camp a quantity of rum, with which they had a jolly time.

Jeffard drank himself into such a condition that the band determined to desert him, and they had left him there in the woods, dead drunk and destitute.

There was a splendid chance to capture him, and the spy believed that Lawson would have no difficulty in taking him alive.

This was just the chance that Ben wanted, and he lost no time in acting upon the information he had received.

He told the boatmen that he had found a man who would act as guide to the camp of the Kanucks, and that the chance must be seized at once.

Two of them—Jerry Burnham and Bob Styles—borrowing rifles from Sam Staley and his wounded son, hastily left the tavern with Lawson and Neptune.

Antoine Jaunot guided them by the most direct route to the place they were seeking, but halted the party just before it was reached.

He begged that they would not compel him to go further, as he was unwilling that his comrades should discover him to be a traitor, and Lawson dismissed him and let him go his way.

"That man is a Kanuck, too," said Jerry Burnham. "Like as not he is trying to play some trick on us."

"I am pretty sure that I can trust him in this," replied Lawson, "and we are not going to run into any hole. If we come across the scamps, whether they are many or few, we ought to be able to take care of ourselves."

It was then near the middle of the afternoon; but Lawson and his party gave themselves no uneasiness concerning the lateness of the hour, as Neptune, having been over the route once, could guide them back to the tavern in the darkness as well as in the daylight.

They advanced cautiously, and had gone only a little further when they were startled by hideous yells and cries.

"What in thunder is that?" demanded Bob Styles.

"Don't know," answered Lawson. "Somebody is raising the Old Harry here in some shape. Go easy, boys, and we will soon know what we are going to strike."

The yells increased as they advanced, and soon they came in sight of the person who was responsible for them.

It was a man, bareheaded, and wild of aspect, with part of his clothing stripped off, and the rest ragged and dirty, who was running about aimlessly, uttering such cries as they had heard, and stopping now and then to beat the air, as if combating unseen foes.

The locality was a broad piece of bottom-land, marshy in places, though there was little moisture in the ground at that time of the year, and covered with tall trees.

A little way beyond the man, who was quite alone there, a stretch of open land, or meadow, reached back to a bluff.

"There is only one of them," said Burnham. "Where are the rest? What is the matter with that fellow, anyhow?"

"He must be crazy," replied Lawson, an-

swering a part of the question. "A case of jimjams, I should guess. Wait here, boys, and see me catch him and snake him out of there."

"There's another!" exclaimed Styles, pointing up at the bluff.

As the others caught sight of the object pointed out to them a shot was fired in that direction, and the man whom Bob Styles had discovered fell headlong down the face of the bluff.

"Somebody else huntin' the skunks," remarked Burnham.

The shot had an exciting effect upon the man below, who ran around more wildly than before, and uttered yet more hideous yells.

Ben Lawson motioning to his companions to keep back, unwound from about his waist a light line, which was nothing less than the lasso with which he had previously captured Antoine Jaunot.

Stepping swiftly forward, he threw the lasso toward the man, who stood and faced him, uttering yells of rage and terror.

As the noose settled over his head and body Lawson quickly drew it taut, pinioning his arms to his sides, and he fell to the ground, foaming at the mouth as if in a fit.

It was easy enough then to capture the prostrate man, whom Lawson had already recognized as Joe Jeffard.

After the capture, however, it was necessary to tie him, as he recovered from his swoon, and became more frantic than ever.

While the paroxysm lasted he was as strong as a mad bull, but was utterly weak and nervous when it had passed away.

In the mean time the party of Maine men found something else to interest them.

Down the steep bluff two persons were scrambling, one of whom was a tall man, and the other quite short, apparently a boy.

When they reached the plain they came toward the captors of Jeffard at a rapid gait.

The tall man was speedily recognized by the boatmen, as well as by Ben Lawson, and Hemlock Hank was joyfully and noisily greeted.

"Who have you got here, and what's the matter with him?" demanded Hank.

"The leader of the Kanuck gang, and it's the jimjams," briefly answered Lawson. "Who's your friend, Hank?"

"His name is Abner Sanders, and he is a cousin of Nick Sanders, the man you have heard of. He has just tumbled one of the Kanucks over the bluff yonder."

"Did you see any more of 'em?" inquired Jerry Burnham.

"Only that one."

"Then you have found Nick Sanders," remarked Lawson.

"Found the hull fam'ly."

"How did that happen?"

"Well, I kinder dropped onto 'em, as I may say. What are you goin' to do with this subject?"

"I am going to take him to Staley's, if I can get him there. He is the very man I have been wanting to get hold of. I think he knows something about that Cranston business, and I mean to squeeze the truth out of him if I can."

"I'm with you there, my boy. Wonder how he came to be left alone here."

"He drank rum until he put himself into this fix, and the other skunks deserted him. They have cleaned out the camp, as you see."

"Jest so. Hello! he's gittin' rambunctious. It'll puzzle us to take him to Staley's."

Abner Sanders led Jerry Burnham to the spot where his victim had fallen from the bluff, and there they found the body of the Kanuck with two rifles near him, one of which Burnham recognized as his own, and both of which he seized upon.

It was found necessary to make a litter of poles and brush for the conveyance of Joe Jeffard, who was too weak to walk except when he was seized by his paroxysms, which gave his captors considerable trouble at first, but became fewer and fainter as they progressed.

At best they got on slowly, and the night was well advanced when they reached Staley's.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SQUEEZING OUT THE TRUTH.

AT Staley's Ben Lawson and his party met a surprise which to some of them was a very pleasant one.

In the afternoon, not long after the departure of the expedition, there had been an arrival at the tavern.

Sam Staley was also greatly pleased by the arrival; for his new guest was no less a personage than Judge Meacham, who was always welcome at those hostelrys in the woods at which he was in the habit of stopping.

With two stout men to row and pole his boat, he had made a quick trip up the river, and was glad to get back into the woods, though he could not expect to remain there long.

His first inquiry had been for Ben Lawson, and Sam Staley had not only informed him of that young man's whereabouts, but had given him all the news of the vicinity, which had of late been quite exciting.

Directly on the arrival of the party that brought in Joe Jeffard, Judge Meacham made the acquaintance of Ben Lawson, to whom he gave a letter from Mary Payson, which the recipient hastily and eagerly read.

His joy and gratitude when he had finished it were almost beyond his expression.

"This is great news, Judge Meacham," said he. "Mary tells me that you are her uncle, and I can imagine how glad she was to discover such a relative. She also says that you have promised to do what you can to help her out of her troubles, and it is no wonder that she was happy when she wrote, as no man can do more in that way than you can."

"That is what I am here for," responded the judge. "I know where Nick Sanders is, and I believe him to be innocent of the murder of Mrs. Jardine. I have decided that it will be best to take him down the country, and let him face his accusers and tell his story. I hope that in that way we may find a clew to the real murderer."

"Perhaps we may find it sooner than that," eagerly replied Lawson. "I have just got hold of the man whom I followed from Cranston up here into the woods."

"What man is that?"

"His name is Joe Jeffard, a French Canadian, who has lived several years in the States, a vagabond and a thorough scoundrel. He was in Cranston at the time of the murder, and I got on his trail there, because I had reason to suspect that he knew something about that murder, if he was not actually concerned in it. I might have had him before now; but I did not see my way clear to persuade him to tell the truth."

"What sort of a hold have you got on him now?"

"The fact is that he has nearly murdered himself with rum. Delirium tremens has a strong hold on him just now, and I doubt if he can live long. Perhaps we can work on his conscience and squeeze the truth out of him. I wish you would come and look at him."

Joe Jeffard had been placed on a pallet on the floor of the sleeping-room of the tavern, where he was tended and guarded, at the request of Ben Lawson, by Hemlock Hank and Jerry Burnham.

The landlord, who had become very fond of Ben Lawson, was willing to do everything in his power for the comfort even of that wretch, if by so doing he could please Ben.

Jeffard occasionally had returns of the paroxysms which had seized him in the woods, and on those occasions he was frantic and violent, requiring the efforts of two strong men to restrain him.

As they subsided he would become passably rational, begging piteously for liquor, which Lawson had ordered not to be furnished to him by any person but himself.

After awhile, when his appeals were unheeded, he would sink into a stupor which could not be called sleep.

He had passed into the second stage when Lawson brought Judge Meacham in to see him, and his entreaties became more vehement as his wild eyes rested on Ben.

"Give me some rum!" he feebly exclaimed. "Give me some rum—you! If you do, I may tell you something that you'll be glad to know. If you don't, I will die here like a dog, without speaking a word."

Lawson made no answer, but stood there in silence while his companion examined the prostrate man.

Judge Meacham, who claimed to know

something of medicine, felt of Jeffard's pulse, looked closely at his eyes, noted the condition of his skin and muscles, and asked a few questions, which the patient was rational enough to answer.

Then he beckoned to Lawson, who followed him to another part of the house.

"It is a very bad case of alcoholic poisoning," said the judge. "The man cannot recover. The best resources of medicine, if we had them here, could not pull him through. It is quite likely that he may die within a few hours."

"Shall I give him what he calls for?" asked Ben.

"Yes—there can be no harm now in feeding him liquor. But we must administer it slowly and judiciously, in small doses, so as to brace him up a little and make him comfortable—in fact, to ease him off. But we must make the supply dependent on his telling the truth before witnesses, and he is rational enough to do that if he will."

This programme was carefully carried out by Ben Lawson under the direction of Judge Meacham.

He brought into the room a bottle of Staley's best Medford rum, with such appliances as he needed, and awoke the patient, who had then fallen into a stupor.

When Jeffard caught sight of the bottle, his eyes brightened, and he began to clamor for drink.

"You said a little while ago," observed Ben, "that if I would give you some rum you would tell me something that I would be glad to know. Will you tell it now, if I will supply you with liquor?"

"Yes," feebly answered the wretch, as he tried to rise. "Give me the bottle."

"Not quite so fast. I will manage the bottle and give you the drinks."

Jeffard was raised up and given such a dose as Lawson thought proper, which seemed to please him without satisfying him.

But he was no longer willing to tell anything.

"It is about the murder of that old lady in Cranston," suggested Lawson. "I am sure that you know all about it, and I want you to tell the truth, for the sake of an innocent man who is accused."

"Don't you wish you may get it?" answered Jeffard with a sneer.

Ben knew that the wretch would soon be willing to sell his soul for more liquor, and that he could afford to wait; but he thought that he might as well hurry up matters a little.

"It is my duty to tell you, Joe Jeffard," said he, "that you have not long to live. This gentleman—pointing to Judge Meacham—"who knows what he is talking about, has told me so."

"Was that what he was looking me over for?" inquired Jeffard.

"Just for that, and he says that there is no hope for you. All we could do for you here would not keep you from dying, and you may as well make a clean breast of that Cranston business before you go off the hooks. Nothing that you say now can ever be used against you in this world."

Just then the craving came upon the wretch again, more violently than before.

"Give me some rum!" he cried. "Quick! They're coming! Give me some rum to drive them off!"

Lawson dosed him again, and he became more tranquil.

"Ain't you playing any tricks on me?" he faintly asked.

"No tricks at all," answered Ben. "It is too serious a matter for that."

"Do you really believe that I am going to die?"

"We are sure of it."

"Shouldn't wonder if you're right there. I feel that way, myself. Guess I may as well tell. Will you give me plenty of rum if I do?"

"I promise you that."

"Will that old gentleman promise, too?"

Judge Meacham also promised.

Jeffard called for another drink, which was given him.

Hemlock Hank raised him to a sitting posture, and he breathed hard as he looked at the judge and Lawson.

All listened eagerly as he began to speak, and Judge Meacham, who had brought in

paper and a pencil, prepared to take down his words as they were uttered.

"I suppose," he said, "that the innocent man you spoke of is Nick Sanders."

"That is the man," answered Ben, "and you ought to say something to clear him. There is a young lady, too—Miss Payson—who is wrongfully accused of having put Nick up to the job."

"Is that so?" murmured Jeffard. "That is too bad. I didn't know that she was mixed up in it. Give me another drink. I can pay for all I want. There's a man not far from here that I can draw on for any amount of money."

"You don't need to pay for anything," said Ben, as he dosed the patient again. "Go on and tell your story, and we will take the best possible care of you."

"Nick Sanders didn't kill the old woman," was Jeffard's first revelation. "I was the man. Nick never had anything to do with it. He left Cranston before the job was done. But that ain't all. Listen, here, and I will tell you all about it."

Joe Jeffard's story was not a short one, and he told it fully and freely, with due attention to details.

The liquor that was doled out to him at intervals stimulated him sufficiently for the purpose, though his voice was weak, and Judge Meacham took down his words as they were uttered.

When the statement was concluded it was read to him in the presence of the others, and he signed it by affixing his mark.

Judge Meacham then hastened out to find Abner Sanders, to whom he was anxious to give the news of his cousin Nick's innocence.

The lad was not much affected by this intelligence, which was nothing more than he had expected to hear, sooner or later.

"I knew that Nick never did it," said he. "He hain't got the grit to kill anybody. I knocked over a man as we was comin' on here, without thinkin' twice about it."

"You killed a man?" exclaimed the judge. "Who was that? Why did you do it?"

"He was one o' those cursed skunks o' Kanucks, who tried to kill my folks, and did kill poor Boney. I settled him, though."

"If you are so bloodthirsty, my boy, I shall be afraid to give you the cartridges I bought for your rifle."

"Did you bring 'em, judge? Please give 'em to me. I won't kill anythin' that walks on two legs ag'in, if you say so."

The cartridges were produced and presented, greatly to the delight of Abner.

Joe Jeffard could not be induced to take a solemn or serious view of his condition, but kept calling for liquor as long as he was able to use his voice, and finally expired in a stupor.

Early the next morning Judge Meacham and Ben Lawson set out for the Sanders habitation, accompanied by Hemlock Hank, Abner and Neptune.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DICK AND THE DELUGE.

WHEN Terrapin Dick left the camp on the plateau, followed by the wonder and suspicion of his comrade, he had a distinct and definite purpose in his mind, which he had no idea of explaining to Julius.

His discovery of the existence of Hemlock Hank had so strongly excited him that he thought of nothing but meeting his old friend and taking him by the hand.

The threatening weather did not worry him in the least, nor was he at all bothered by the thought that Julius Muldrow might be left alone during an entire day and night.

He had little sympathy for that young man at the best, and less than ever since he had suspected him in connection with Hemlock Hank's disaster.

As for the business that had brought him into the woods, that was abandoned, if not forgotten.

He no longer had the least desire to capture Nick Sanders and take him back to Cranston for trial.

On the contrary, his intention was, as he then regarded it, to surrender himself to the Sanders family—to put himself on their side—to make friends with them at any cost of self-respect or of prospective profit—to do anything and everything that would enable him to rejoin his friend.

The time had been when defeat in such an enterprise would have been scarcely less than death to him; now it was a matter of not the least moment.

Before, he had admired Hemlock Hank, and had cherished him as a comrade; now, he loved him with a greater affection than he could have bestowed upon a brother.

Thus it was that he was as light-hearted as a boy, and full of pleasant expectations, when he left the plateau.

He started down the nearly dry bed of the mountain stream which he had recently discovered, and which afforded a comparatively easy means of descending the rugged heights.

Its course was nearly straight, and for a considerable part of the distance its bed was not deep.

Then it passed through a narrow and steep ravine with precipitous sides, at the foot of which was a basin in which a quantity of water had collected.

The slight overflow of the water at this point, being the usual amount furnished by the stream at the dry season, made a pretty little waterfall as it tumbled over a rocky declivity, where occurred the only really hard climbing that he found during the descent.

As he was hastily picking his way in that direction, the clouds were gathering above and behind him, much darker and more ominous than when he left the plateau.

He had just entered the narrow and steep pass that has been mentioned, when the clouds burst.

The storm that followed was indeed a cloudburst, and no other name would suit it.

Though it covered but a small area, and doubtless would scarcely have been noticed from a distance, it was intense and terrible where it occurred and while it lasted.

A perfect deluge of water dropped down from above, as if the bottom had fallen out of some huge reservoir up there.

It was accompanied by terrific peals of thunder, and the black clouds that held and discharged the moisture swooped down upon the mountain and hid it from view.

While Terrapin Dick, who happened to be at the easterly edge of the rainfall, was looking among the rocks for shelter from what he considered a heavy but passing shower, an avalanche of water had gathered above him, and was rushing down the bed of the stream.

He noticed that the brook was swelling pretty rapidly, but made no special account of that circumstance, as the idea of danger had not yet entered his head.

Hardly had he found his place of shelter when he awoke to the fact of a flood.

The stream had suddenly swollen to a torrent, and it was nothing less than a wall of water that was pouring down into the ravine.

It rushed in so rapidly and in such vast volume that only a part of it could find egress at the other end, and that which remained was fast rising in the basin, boiling and seething, covered with branches of trees and fragments of wood.

Only a glance was needed to tell the detective that the situation was full of peril.

He looked about for a way of escape from the calamity that had so suddenly overtaken him.

That was just what he failed to find. He could not go back up the mountain, as the downward rushing flood was an insurmountable barrier in that direction.

He could not escape at the other end, as the torrent would be sure to whirl him down the rocks to destruction.

The danger was that he would be dragged away and hurled over the fall against his will.

With every moment this danger increased, and the need of escape became more urgent.

Risden was forced to the conclusion that his only chance for life was to climb the precipitous side of the ravine where he was.

The other side offered better opportunities for climbing, but was as much out of his reach as if it had been miles away.

With the water rising rapidly above his feet he began to climb, leaving his rifle to be swallowed up by the flood.

He clutched with his fingers points and crevices in the nearly smooth surface of the rock, and desperately dug the toes of his boots into other crevices.

The task was so hard as to be almost hopeless, and he nearly despaired when he perceived that the water rose quite as rapidly as he ascended.

But he persevered, and was gradually nearing a point where the climbing would be easier, and where he hoped to be out of danger, when both his feet slipped at once.

He strove to cling to the face of the rock with his hands; but the slippery hold could not be retained, and, in spite of his utmost efforts, he dropped down into the boiling whirlpool that filled the basin.

While there is life there is hope.

Though there was but little hope in this case, Terrapin Dick was the man to make the most of that little.

Rising at once to the surface, he struck out boldly for the rocky wall, hoping to get a hold somewhere that would prevent him from being swept over the fall.

But the torrent seized him, and carried him whither it pleased, as if he had been a stick or a straw.

As he was whirled over to the other side, and then borne swiftly toward the lower end of the ravine, he renewed his efforts, though already convinced that they were in vain.

An end was put to the unequal battle by the big branch of a tree, which came tearing down into the ravine, and struck him on the head.

Stunned by the blow, he sunk, and knew nothing more.

But his struggles, from the beginning of his attempt to climb, had been watched by a young man at the other side of the basin.

It has been said that the rocks on that side were comparatively easy to climb, and the young man was cautiously descending them, at the same time looking out for a chance to assist the imperiled individual across the water.

It would not do to call to him, as a shout might startle him and deprive him of his chance to save himself.

When that chance was gone, and Risden dropped into the whirlpool and was swept away by the torrent, the young man saw his opportunity and hastened to use it.

He had already uncoiled from his waist a light line with a noose in one end, and had made the other end fast.

With the noosed end of the line in his hand, he descended to the flood, and waited for his chance.

As soon as Risden was struck and stunned he jumped in the water, caught the detective by the coat, and quickly passed the noose over his shoulders and under his arms.

The torrent pulling them in one direction, and the line holding them in another, both were swept against the side of the basin, when Risden's savior dragged his prize up the rocks to a ledge where he would be out of reach of the flood.

By this time, indeed, the deluge had dwindled to a gentle rain, which soon ceased.

Shortly, too, the water in the basin began to subside, and ran out almost as rapidly as it had run in.

For a little while it was a question whether Risden would revive.

Though the blow he had received had merely stunned him, he had then been half drowned.

His rescuer rubbed and rolled him vigorously, and in the course of this exercise discovered in his pocket a flask of liquor, a portion of which he administered to the patient.

These various inducements persuaded life to return to the detective, who opened his eyes, sat up, and helped himself to a drink from his own flask.

He saw before him a young man, at whom he looked closely.

"I suppose you have saved my life," he remarked.

"I guess I helped," answered the other.

"As there is nobody else about here, you must have done the entire job. I never saw you before, my friend, but I think I know you."

"Same here."

"You are Nick Sanders."

"And your name is Risden."

"That is correct. Did you know that I came up here to catch you?"

"Yes," quietly answered Nick.

"And yet you saved my life."

"Oh, I couldn't see you drown, you know. Besides, I ain't a bit afraid. Wouldn't grum-

ble much at bein' carried back to Cranston, anyhow."

"Well, Nick, I don't believe you have lost anything by helping me. I was on my way to your place when the flood struck me."

"What for? To ketch me?"

"No; I have given that up. I was going there to tell you so, and to find my friend, Hank Ward. Is he with your people?"

"Not now."

"Not now? What has become of him?"

"He has gone away."

"Gone away, and has not come near me? I don't understand that."

"You see," replied Nick, "that he is a kind of a prisoner, and has to do what we say, and go where we let him. Abner started off to Staley's this mornin', and dad let Mr. Ward go with him."

"Was he much hurt when he fell?"

"Scarcely a bit."

"How did he happen to fall?"

"Didn't happen. Julius Muldrow tumbled him over."

"The infernal scoundrel!" exclaimed Risden. "I was sure that something of the kind was the matter. I felt a bit sorry about leaving that wretch alone; but now I don't care what becomes of him. When do you think Hank will be back?"

"Some time to-morrow."

"I will go home with you, Nick, if you will let me, and wait for him there."

"Glad to have you."

The water had by that time so nearly run out of the ravine that there would be no difficulty in following the bed of the stream.

Risden found his rifle where he had dropped it, and went down the mountain with his new friend.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A KANUCK CAPTURE.

JULIUS MULDROW was terribly depressed by the departure of Terrapin Dick.

It was not alone the absence of his only remaining companion and protector that troubled him, but the fear that the absence meant some calamity to himself which as yet he could only guess at.

Risden's sudden change of manner and temper, as well as change of intention, had set his suspicions at work, and they hourly became more active.

It looked as if the detective had discovered something, and what was it?

His discovery, if he had made one, must surely be connected with the fate of Hemlock Hank.

But what could he have found out?

What was it possible for him to learn concerning that sudden and utter disappearance?

There could be no doubt that Hank had been killed by that fearful fall, and how was the story of his death to be told, except by the man who was responsible for it?

Julius forced himself to look over the edge of the cliff, to see if anything was there that might possibly lead to his detection.

But there was nothing of the kind to be seen, and, if there had been anything, his shortness of sight would not have allowed him to see it.

He settled down to the conclusion that Risden could have nothing but guess-work to go on, and that he had nearly been seized by a sudden freak—perhaps by a desire to make an effort to find the body of his friend.

The young man's thoughts were necessarily diverted from this unpleasant and perplexing subject by the deluge of rain that poured down before noon.

Even that was a relief to him, though it was the most terrible display of elemental force that he had yet witnessed.

It came on so suddenly that he had only time to get a few articles inside of the tent, and to seek that shelter for himself, when the cloud-burst dropped its deluge upon the plateau.

Torrents of water poured down the side of the mountain, and it seemed as if all the earth that covered the rock, with the trees that were rooted in it, must be swept away.

The flood tore through the tent, and over the entire plateau was spread a sheet of muddy water.

When the rain had ceased, and the flood had subsided, he crawled out, a wretched and uncomfortable being.

With no little difficulty he managed to get together the drenched provisions and camp utensils and cook some dinner for himself.

He had little appetite, and after dinner he was lonesome and miserable.

But Risden had left him on two previous occasions, returning by nightfall, and why could not this day be worried through as the others had been?

So he worried through it until dusk, when he prepared supper for himself and his companion, and anxiously awaited the return of the detective.

Night closed in on the plateau, and Risden did not arrive.

Julius could not eat anything, he was so troubled by the fear that he had been deserted.

After a while another thought occurred to him.

Risden had related his discovery of the bed of the stream, and of course he had descended the mountain by that route.

The torrent which had been produced by the deluge must have taken the same route, and might not the detective have been caught by it and swept downward to his death?

Whether it was death or desertion that prevented his return, Muldrow was equally in a most unpleasant predicament, being left alone, with no guide, and with no knowledge of woodcraft to enable him to find his way through the forest.

He built a big fire, and passed a wakeful night.

In fact, he got but scanty snatches of sleep, lying down with a rifle on each side of him, and getting up every now and then to feed the fire.

Morning came at last, and Dick Risden had not arrived.

Noon came, and still there were no signs of him.

By that time Julius Muldrow was in a state of mind that threatened to overthrow his reason.

He tramped over and over the plateau, after looking down into the basin, and wearying himself in body and mind by his restless wandering and wondering.

He ate scarcely anything during the day, and when the night came again and brought no Risden, he was so tired that he fell asleep.

But his sleep was broken by terrible dreams, from which he awoke trembling and shivering, and his one resource was to feed the fire and cower over it, as if it were his only friend.

During his waking moments he resolved that he would quit the camp and follow the route down the mountain which Risden had taken.

If he should not find the detective, or should find him dead, his only chance would be to try to reach the people in the basin and seek succor from them.

Even if they should treat him as an enemy, that would be better than to lose his way and starve in the mountain or the forest.

In the morning, as he had abandoned all hope of the return of Risden, he proceeded to put this plan in execution.

He loaded himself with provisions and ammunition, took his own rifle, and set out.

The day was clear and bright and warm, and he began to be inspired by the hope that he would at least secure his own safety, if he should fail to find his comrade.

At first he found the descent easy enough, the stream which had been a torrent when Terrapin Dick went down, having shrunk to a mere rill.

After awhile it became more difficult, and when he reached the ravine where the detective had nearly lost his life, he was obliged to stop and rest.

While he was resting he ate a lunch, and while he was thus employed something occurred that was quite unexpected, and very unpleasant.

To explain this occurrence it will be necessary to go back to Antoine Jaunot.

That spying and scheming Kanuck, after he had guided Ben Lawson and his friends to the spot where Joe Jeffard was contending against imaginary adversaries, had not re-

mained to ascertain what was done there, or what became of his enemy.

It was sufficient for him to know that he would no more be bothered by Jeffard, and that the band of vagabonds would thereafter submit to his leadership.

Moreover, he had his doubts whether the Maine men, failing to find the rascals who had plundered them, might not pounce upon him and punish him for the sins of the others.

So he made himself scarce in that vicinity, and hastened to the rendezvous at which he was to meet his comrades.

He found them all there, with one exception.

One of them, who had been the special friend and advocate of Joe Jeffard, had lingered behind for the purpose of watching the movements of the ex-chief, and possibly with the view of rendering him assistance in case of need.

They waited for him at the rendezvous, but he did not show up.

They waited until night, and still he did not appear.

Then they waited until morning.

As he had not then put in an appearance, they consulted as to their future movements.

They were well supplied with provisions, ammunition, and other valuables which they had captured at the river.

Having recently had before their eyes an awful example of the evil effects of rum when immoderately used, they wisely resolved that they would touch the liquor lightly, and Antoine Jaunot, who was known to be a passably sober man, was put in charge of the supply.

On the advice of Jaunot their first move was made in the direction of the Sanders stronghold.

As he assured them, the water-gap game could not be played on them again, and they might pick up some valuable prizes in that vicinity.

For his part, though he did not explain this motive to his comrades, his back was yet sore from the strokes of a certain hickory switch, and he hoped for a chance to avenge himself upon the man who had scored him.

So the band, reduced to four men, camped in a secluded spot near the Sanders habitation, and scouted over that region in search of prey.

But they found the pass newly and strongly fortified, so that there was no chance for them to play the sneak-thief game.

As they were too weak to attack the stronghold, they returned to their camp, somewhat disconsolate.

The next morning Jaunot took them up into the mountain, as he had found a trail that led in that direction, and hoped that something valuable might be found at the end of it.

They followed the trail to the nearly dry bed of a mountain stream, which they ascended, occasionally finding tracks in the mud that had been left by a recent storm.

When they had reached the foot of a declivity down which the thin stream fell in a shower of spray, Jaunot climbed it, as the trail evidently led upward.

Suddenly he signaled to his comrades to follow him, and to come in silence.

He had discovered a man whom he at once recognized as the person who had whipped him.

His companions crawled up, and saw the man seated on a rock, eating, with his face turned toward the head of the ravine which they had entered.

Stealthily and silently they crept behind him, and, at a signal from Jaunot, pounced upon him and overpowered him.

Julius Muldrow was so completely taken by surprise that he was incapable of resistance, and was tied hand and foot before he could begin to struggle.

In one of his captors he recognized the man who had been caught in the woods, and to whom he had administered a severe castigation.

Seeing in the Kanuck's face the hunger for revenge, he begged for his life, and offered to pay largely for his liberty.

Jaunot, who had found the chance he was aching for, laughed at his entreaties.

The four Kanucks raised the young man, and bore him, screaming, begging and threatening, up the rocks.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

JULIUS MULDROW'S END.

NICK SANDERS guided the man he had rescued to the pass that led to the hole in the hills, and the discharge of his rifle brought out Dave, who opened the gate for them.

Being introduced by Nick, who explained the circumstances under which he had discovered him, Terrapin Dick was well received by the Sanders family, and speedily made friends with them all.

When they discovered that he was not a wolf, prowling about to compass the destruction of one of their kindred, and when they were made acquainted with his real sentiments on the subject of the Cranston murder, they were more than willing to be friendly with him.

Mrs. Sanders, who knew how affectionately he was regarded by his close friend, Hank Ward, took a liking to him at once, and treated him with the utmost kindness and hospitality.

When night came Ike Sanders spoke to him of the young man whom he had left alone up in the mountain, and who might be expected to miss him.

"I give myself no uneasiness about him," answered Ridsen, "simply because I don't care what becomes of him. A little while ago I would have worried about him, but now he is out of my thoughts."

"Somethin' ought to be done to the darned skunk in the way of justice," suggested Ike.

"Yes, but I doubt whether anything will be done. Hank Ward is too soft-hearted to want to punish him severely, and I suppose his punishment will be left to Providence. I wonder what it will be."

Terrapin Dick showed no desire to leave the pleasant quarters into which he had been introduced.

Indeed, his wish to meet and greet his old friend Hemlock Hank would have overcome any such desire.

Hank and Abner came in before night, and with them came a pleasant surprise, as they were accompanied by Judge Meacham and Ben Lawson.

Mutual congratulations were cheering and extensive, and the swapping of news was highly interesting to all parties.

Ridsen, who had already learned the particulars of Hemlock Hank's escape from death, told how he had caught sight of his friend from the edge of the cliff, and had at once abandoned everything to go in search of him.

He went on to tell how his expedition had been disastrously interfered with by the deluge, and how Nick Sanders had saved him from certain death.

"So you left that young cuss up there alone," observed Hank.

"Yes."

"He is sufferin', I guess."

"Yes, but he deserves it, and a great deal more, for the murderous trick he played you."

"Well, I don't mean to worry him. He is safe, except for the hold the law may have on him, and that ain't no small matter, I'm thinkin'."

"What do you mean, Hank?"

"Why, Dick Ridsen, we've beat your game, or played it out for you, just as you choose to take it. We found the real murderer of the old lady in Cranston. That is, Mr. Lawson did. I guess he can tell the story straighter and better than I can."

Lawson told of his suspicions and pursuit of Joe Jeffard, and detailed the capture and confession of that scoundrel, up to the fact that he was the murderer.

"So you see," remarked Hank, "that poor Nick Sanders is as innocent as you or I."

"That is what I thought all along," replied the detective.

"But that ain't all, by a darned sight. There's somethin' else that you didn't think of."

"Perhaps I did."

"Perhaps you did? What was it, then?"

"That the author of the crime—the man who prompted it and paid for it—was Julius Muldrow."

"You've hit it, by thunder! Yes, that mean and spiteful cuss was at the bottom of the hull wickedness, and that's the hold the law has got on him."

Jeffard's confession was read to the detective, and there was no doubt in the minds of those present that Julius Muldrow was guilty of the murder as an accessory.

Whether his guilt could be proved to the satisfaction of a jury was another question.

Judge Meacham was able to throw some light on the subject by a description of his visit to Cranston.

"The only question is," said he, "for what purpose Julius Muldrow planned that murder, and then strove to fasten the guilt upon Nick Sanders, implicating Miss Payson as his accomplice. Either he knew that his aunt had made a will in favor of himself and his sister, and wanted to come quickly into possession of the property; or he knew that the will was in favor of Mary Payson, and wanted to get hold of it and at the same time prevent the old lady from making another. I am inclined to believe that the latter supposition is correct, from the fact that it is known that Mrs. Jardine had executed one will in favor of Mary."

It was settled that a portion of the party should go up into the mountain the next morning, to bring down Julius Muldrow and the camp articles and provisions that had been left there.

It was also settled that no hint should be given Julius of the discoveries they had made concerning his complicity in the murder of Mrs. Jardine.

In the morning Ridsen and Hemlock Hank started to climb the mountain, accompanied by Ben Lawson, Neptune, and Abner Sanders, the lad having insisted upon joining the party.

Skirting around the base of the mountain, they entered the bed of the stream which the detective had discovered, and ascended it, seeing little evidence of the devastation of the flood.

Indeed, they were so occupied with their own thoughts and conversation, that they took no notice of the trail recently made by the Kanucks, which, though faint, was visible to keen eyes.

As they approached the declivity at the foot of the ravine, over which the mountain brook fell, they halted for a brief rest.

"That," said Ridsen, "is the only hard climb that is left on the route. Then we will pass through the place where I came so near being wiped out, and after that the travel is easy enough."

"I guess that cussed young scoundrel will be sorter surprised at seein' me," remarked Hemlock Hank.

"If the surprise should kill him," replied Ridsen, "there would be no damage done."

"Look there!" excitedly shouted Abner Sanders, pointing upward and in front of them.

The others glanced quickly in the direction the lad pointed out, and saw a sight that amazed and shocked them.

On a height at the left, in plain sight, but some distance above the head of the ravine, were four men, who held a fifth man, about whose neck was a rope, leading to a branch of a stunted tree that leaned over the edge of the height.

The four men were so intently occupied with their own proceedings, that they saw nothing of those who were approaching below.

"The Kanucks!" shouted Hemlock Hank.

"They've got Julius Muldrow!" exclaimed the detective.

The Kanucks had already swung off their victim, and in another instant the rope was made fast to the trunk of the tree.

One of them immediately began to dance about upon the rocks, yelling at the top of his voice:

"Whippa me, hey! Whippa me, hey!"

A sudden stop was put to his exultation.

A rifle-shot woke the echoes of the mountain, and the dancing Kanuck, leaping suddenly into the air, fell headlong to the foot of the height.

It was Abner who fired the shot.

"Another of 'em for Boney," he coolly remarked.

Nobody took any further notice of the despised Kanuck, as matters of closer personal interest demanded their attention.

Ridsen hastily climbed the declivity, followed by his companions.

From the ravine they scrambled up the

rocks to the stunted tree that had been used as a gallows.

The remainder of the Kanucks had got well out of the way; but their victim was still hanging there.

Julius Muldrow was lowered and drawn in upon the rocks, and was discovered to be quite dead, as it had taken the climbers nearly half an hour to reach him.

A search of his person disclosed a folded paper, carefully wrapped up, which proved to be the will of Mrs. Jardine.

By this will she left legacies to her nephew and niece, but gave the bulk of her property to Mary Payson.

"It may seem strange to some people," said Ridsen, "that he kept this paper; but it is not at all strange. They all do it. If they don't do this very thing, they do something like it. Perhaps he could not bring himself to the point of destroying such a reminder of his crime. Perhaps he thought that if he should get into trouble he might use this paper to buy himself clear."

"He has been punished for one and all, and that's an end of it," remarked Hemlock Hank.

The body of Julius Muldrow was buried in the woods near by, and the party went up to the plateau and collected the property there, which they carried to the Sanders habitation.

Then they prepared to go down the river, and as soon as possible a fleet of three skiffs left Staley's, bound for the lower Penobscot, Nick Sanders making the voyage in Ridsen's boat, and Ben Lawson and Judge Meacham in their own skiffs.

CHAPTER XL.

LAWYER ALLYN IS SHOCKED.

NATHAN ALLYN was seated in his office in the village of Cranston.

He was attending, or endeavoring to attend, to his legal labors there, but was making very poor headway.

He was restless and disturbed, and his sharp features wore an unusually pinched and gloomy look.

He called the office-boy, as he styled the snub-nosed and freckled youth who did his "chores," and muddled his weak intellect with contradictory orders.

"Go to the constable's house, Amos, and ask Mr. Humphreys to stop in here as he passes."

"No—you may go to the tavern and see if Mr. Richard Ridsen is stopping there."

"That won't do, either. I don't want him to think that I am running after him. Go to the Jardine house, and ask Miss Muldrow if her brother has come home. He must have returned with the rest, and it is strange that he has not called on me."

When Amos had left the office the lawyer turned his attention to his papers, with as little success as previously, until a visitor arrived, and the visitor was Terrapin Dick.

Mr. Allyn declared that he was glad to see him, and surely did his best to put on the appearance of being glad; but a close observer would have detected in his manner more uneasiness than exaltation.

The fact was, as Mr. Allyn knew, that the detective had arrived in Cranston the night before, and his failure to make an earlier call on the lawyer had caused that gentleman to suspect that something was wrong.

Nothing but a sense of what was due to his professional dignity had prevented him from going out and looking up Ridsen.

No sort of intelligence could be gleaned from the detective's face as he seated himself and he was slow to tell his news.

"I have succeeded in the mission that took me up into the woods, Mr. Allyn," said he.

"Glad to hear it. That is eminently satisfactory, and your money is ready for you whenever your accounts are made up."

"The man who murdered Miss Jardine was found up there, Mr. Allyn."

"Exactly so. I knew that you had got him. But he does not seem to be under arrest. How is that?"

"He is as much under arrest as he can be."

"I saw him a while ago from my office window, at liberty, walking up the street."

"Impossible," replied Ridsen. "The man is dead."

"Dead? Nick Sanders dead? Am I not to believe my own eyes?"

"I was not speaking of Nick Sanders, Mr. Allyn."

"Of whom were you speaking, then?" demanded the lawyer, who could not conceal his agitation.

"Of the man who murdered Mrs. Jardine. He was a French Canadian, named Jeffard. Before he died he made a full confession, and gave all the particulars of the crime, with the name of the man who hired him to do the deed. That man is dead, too."

"That man? What man?"

"Julius Muldrow."

"Mr. Ridsen, you shock me."

The lawyer was nerveless and ghastly pale as he sunk back in his chair.

"I came here for the purpose of shocking you," said Ridsen. "I thought you needed shocking. I will give you the details if you care to hear them."

Mr. Allyn wanted to hear them right then. It was necessary that he should know all the particulars, unexpected and unpleasant as the intelligence had turned out to be.

The detective gave him a brief sketch of the salient points of the expedition into the woods, read to him the confession of Joe Jeffard, and gave the details of the death of Julius Muldrow.

Nathan Allyn listened in horrified silence, not venturing to interrupt the narrative with a single word.

"That is not all, Mr. Allyn," said Ridsen. "The motive for the murder, which might otherwise have been only guessed at, has been made clear. On the person of Julius Muldrow, after his death, was found the will of Mrs. Jardine, giving the bulk of her property to Mary Payson."

The lawyer groaned.

"Where is that will?" he asked.

"In the possession of Judge Meacham."

Again Nathan Allyn groaned.

No longer could he hope to have the management of the big Jardine estate, and the loss of that business would greatly decrease his influence in the village.

Another matter worried him.

He wanted to know who would break the dreadful news to Miss Muldrow.

"That will devolve upon you, I should say," answered the detective. "You have been her close friend, as well as her brother's. I am not acquainted there. It is clearly your duty to tell her."

Ridsen then left the lawyer to consider the shock and endure it as well as he could.

Agnes Muldrow heard the sad news soon enough, but without the intervention of Nathan Allyn.

Her brother's terrible fate, rather than the loss of the property, affected her reason to such an extent that it became necessary to remove her to an asylum for the insane.

The news had been quickly carried to Mrs. Lawson's cottage by Judge Meacham and Ben Lawson, and there it was good news.

Both of them delighted in telling it, all the details being insisted upon and thoroughly gone into.

It may be proper to state that they were both treated to a large, though not exactly equal, amount of hugging.

Ben Lawson was not prosecuted by Lawyer Allyn for his rude assault upon that gentleman in the village of Cranston, as his marriage with Mary Payson, which shortly occurred, made him a person to be courted, rather than worried.

When Judge Meacham went up into the pine woods the next season he was accompanied by Ben, and Hemlock Hank was their well-paid guide, and the Sanders family were loaded with presents.

As for Nick Sanders, he was never again out of employment in Cranston.

Though Terrapin Dick did not receive from Nathan Allyn the price that had been agreed on for his services, he had no reason to complain of his remuneration from another quarter.

He assured his friends that if he had failed in that stroke of business, he could not wish for a more successful failure.

THE END.

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